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AFTER
THE
SHELLACKING
WHERE DOES OBAMA
GO NEXT?

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

VOLUME 241

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 2, 2010

NUMBER 4,894

Plan of Attack

IT WASN'T TERRIBLY HARD to predict the public's turn toward tea-hurling rage. When Barack Obama came to Washington, he could have hardly anticipated the size and scope of the Great Shellacking of 2010, but he certainly could see something like it coming. From the start of his presidency, his advisers privately warned that all economic downturns generate wild flashes of incumbent-melting heat.

This awareness of a looming populist backlash could have suggested a different political course than one the White House chose. When Obama inherited the financial crisis, he could have let the crisis worsen, blamed his predecessor for the mess, and then claimed credit for any modest recovery. But Barack Obama tethered himself to the bailouts, deciding, in other words, to save the country—and this is how the country shows its gratitude.

When asked to assess his first two years in office, Obama told *The New York Times's* Peter Baker that he focused too much on the technocratic details of his program and not enough on selling it. This sounds a lot like the rote excuse-making of every bludgeoned president—*let history judge me!* But there's more truth to the alibi in this instance. Barack Obama has not done a particularly good job of explaining his mission. Instead of formulating a narrative about the economy—a narrative that might shift some blame to the culprits of the crisis on Wall Street—he continued his inert rhetoric about the broken culture of Washington. He openly mused about the need for Washington to tighten its belt, a line that inadvertently reinforced his opponents' case against his agenda. It was maddening to hear him make such a limp case for his actions, to do such a poor job of calling out his enemies. Of course, there were perils to issuing angrier, more thundering denunciations of bankers. And even if he had sharpened his argument, there's very little chance that he could have staved off the structural forces (high unemployment, a swollen Democratic caucus) that were pointing in the direction of electoral doom.

But it is now imperative for the president to internalize his self-critique. The first two years were a rush of legislation—monumental accomplishments, really, that were worth the

high political costs he just incurred. That chapter is now, quite obviously, closed. Aside from a few isolated patches of possibility, like education and arms control, legislation will be next to impossible. (Even in those instances, Republicans have no incentive to add to Obama's tally sheet of achievements.) The next two years will be all about politics.

The president's initial responses to defeat—his day-after press conference and "60 Minutes" interview—have been disappointingly passive. We fear that Obama is going to give up before the battle has even begun, that he will allow the Republicans to define the initial contours for debate over what kinds of programs the country needs, and content himself with defending what his administration achieved in the last two years.

But the presidency has a two-sided obligation: to interpret and represent the will of the people; but also to provide leadership—that is, to shape what the public thinks the White House and Congress should do. Obama has to keep both these obligations in mind. He may have to settle for legislation and budgets that he deems less than satisfactory. But at the beginning (which is now), he must argue forcefully for what he believes the country does need. If economic conditions require vital investment or another trillion-dollar stimulus program—and not one watered down with useless tax cuts—he must make that case, and make it clearly and boldly.

One reason that Obama has sometimes failed to argue for bolder policies is that he hasn't seemed to grasp their necessity. His administration invested too much credence in a recovery that never fully materialized; they believed that the bailouts and stimulus exhausted their policy options. They cannot be blasé going forward. Here, they need to combine good politics and good policy. They should propose a payroll-tax cut—the one breed of tax cut that Republicans aren't madly enthusiastic about—and force John Boehner and Mitch McConnell on the defensive. Obama should also promote popular infrastructure projects and highlight the GOP's outrageous opposition to Obama's nominees to the Federal Reserve. The president can't allow himself to merely play rope-a-dope. If he fails to mount an aggressive offensive, against both the Republicans and the recession, then the popular rage will not abate. The next time, he will be its prime target. ♦



Split Ends

The myth of divided government.

JONATHAN CHAIT

NO SOONER HAD Republicans swept into power, promising to repeal President Obama's major initiatives and make his defeat their top priority, than a bevy of pundits declared that this was all just a prelude to a new era of moderation and compromise. What will bring about this outbreak of bipartisanship? Simple: divided government. All you need to do is give each party some stake in the success of government, and watch the cooperation blossom.

Jonathan Rauch of the *National Journal* made the case in a *New York Times* op-ed, but the notion is a hardy perennial. Republicans may have sat on the sidelines throwing bombs for two years, the argument goes, but that's only because they had no reason to care. Under divided government, "Both parties, responsible for governing, have a stake in success," writes Rauch.

It would be nice if both parties had a stake in success. But they don't. Political science studies—one by political scientist Helmut Norpoth, and another by Richard Nadeau and Michael Lewis-Beck—have found that voters hold the president alone responsible for the condition of the country.

Think back to the disastrous last two years of the Bush administration. Did voters lay part of the blame on Democrats who controlled the House? Of course not. When the country appeared to be going down the toilet after Democrats won the House in 2006, voters gave them even more seats in 2008. Even when controlling Congress, the party opposing the president has a stake in failure.

Now, in theory, if members of Congress believe they'll be judged by voters for conditions in the country, they'll have an incentive to act responsibly. And for a long time, members of Congress *did* believe this. But it seems pretty clear that Republicans understand that voters hold President Obama almost entirely responsible for the state of the nation and that sabotaging his presidency is their best route to regaining power. A Republican aide recently explained why the party does not fear a standoff that would allow all the Bush tax cuts to expire. "They might blame GOP obstruc-

TRB *From Washington*

tionism," he said. "But, you know, people are going to start missing a lot of money in their weekly paychecks in January. And there's only going to be one person in the White House."

Only one person in the White House. That reflects a correct and clearheaded understanding that, even if Republican intransigence produces an outcome that is regarded as bad by Republicans, it will redound to the party's benefit.

Even if Republicans did misunderstand their own incentives, or just wanted to do noble things out of a self-sacrificial loyalty to the public good, their individual incentives would strongly militate against doing so. Republicans who even considered bipartisan legislation, like Utah Senator Robert Bennett, have faced right-wing primary challengers for their trouble. Even if it *did* make sense for the party as a whole to compromise with Obama, for individual Republicans, it would be a suicide mission.

The premise underlying the predictions of bipartisan cooperation is that policies commanding the center of the political spectrum are inherently superior to those that pit one side against the other. Democrats, argues Rauch, have been "governing from the center of [their] party instead of the center of the country."

But is it really true that Democrats governed from the center of their party? The middle of the Democratic Party favored health care reform with a public option, a cap-and-trade law, labor-law reform with card-check organizing, a larger stimulus, and many other liberal policies that President Obama ran on in 2008. Thanks to the filibuster, they got only the parts that were acceptable to Ben Nelson and the Republican Maine senatorial delegation.

There's certainly something to be said for legislation that draws support from a broad and diverse coalition. That, however, is exactly what we got under one-party government during the last term.

The stimulus drew support from business groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable, labor unions, Wall Street, and most economists. The Affordable Care Act brought together nearly all the stakeholders in the medical and insurance industries along with unions and a host of policy wonks. Cap-and-trade legislation had the backing not just of environmentalists but also labor, utilities, and at least tepid support from a handful of extractive industries.

To believe in the superiority of centrist policies—defined as the middle ground between the two parties—is to tether oneself to the rapid shifts of a radicalizing Republican Party. In 1993, Republicans like Bob Dole endorsed a comprehensive health care plan featuring an individual mandate, subsidies for those who couldn't afford coverage, and regulation of the insurance market. In 2010, that became the "left-wing" plan. To ascribe metaphysical supremacy to policies in "the center" is to believe that Dole's plan was the epitome of moderation and wisdom in 1993, but wild big-government overreach today.

The main trouble with the endorsement of divided government is a failure to grasp the cause of the unraveling of a bipartisan consensus. "[R]ecent presidents have had more success when forced to work with slim majorities in Congress, or even none at all," asserted Matt Bai in *The New York Times* earlier this year. Bai cited tax reform under Ronald Reagan and environmental protection under Richard Nixon. Of course, those policies depended on Republican presidents who accepted goals, such as toughening environmental regulation and cracking down on corporate tax evasion, that are antithetical to the contemporary party.

Electoral politics in a two-party system inherently creates zero-sum competition. This reality was subordinated for a long time, because the peculiar politics of Southern white supremacy created many decades of ideologically amorphous parties with overlapping policy aims. That, in turn, blinded members of Congress to the fact that their success depended upon the other party's failure.

The fetishization of divided government resembles a kind of cargo cult: If only we reconstruct the division of power from 1983, then surely the Greenspan Commission will return to solve our problems. The conditions that created those old bipartisan agreements aren't coming back, no matter what you do to conjure them. ♦



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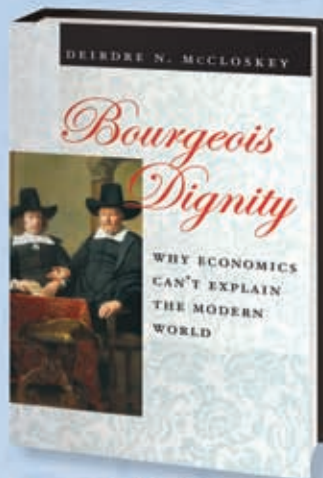
ADVERTISING SALES AND MARKETING

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WEB PRODUCTION MANAGER Dennis Loney (dloney@tnr.com), 202-508-4465

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THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 241, Number 19, Issue 4894, December 2, 2010. (Printed in the United States on November 10, 2010.) Published bi-weekly (except for skipped publication dates of January 21, March 4, April 22, August 5, August 26, September 16, October 7, November 25, December 16 & 23, 2010) at 1331 H Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. Yearly subscriptions, \$79.97; foreign, \$119.97 (U.S. funds); Canada, \$99.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, \$8.00 domestic and \$10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling). © 2010 by TNR II, LLC. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 204-4871. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 15818, North Hollywood, CA 91615-5818. Member, BPA Worldwide. Send letters and unsolicited manuscripts to letters@tnr.com. Poetry submissions must be e-mailed to poetry@tnr.com.

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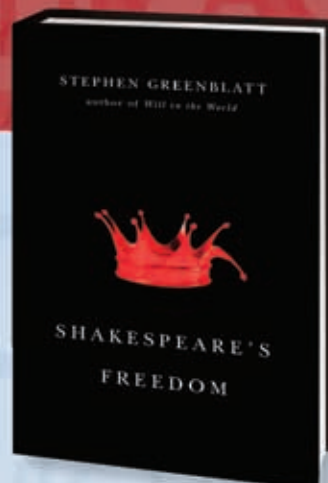
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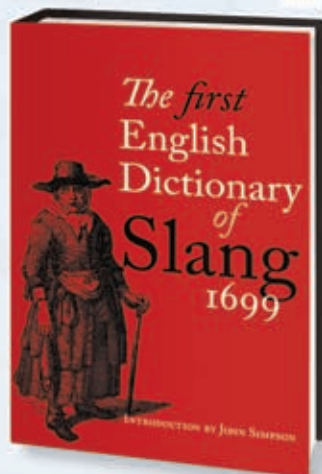
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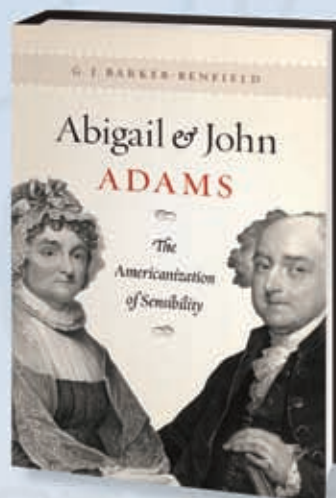


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The Mall

Hack in Business

Dick Morris's Tea Party payday.

DICK MORRIS has never been afraid to test the limits of opportunism. Back in 1994, while working as a political consultant for Republican clients like Trent Lott, he was caught secretly counseling their chief nemesis, President Bill Clinton. Three years later, after his toe-sucking adventures with a prostitute had brought an abrupt end to his stint as a White House adviser, Morris figured the time was right to pen a self-serving memoir, *Behind the Oval Office*, in which he took credit for everything from suggesting Al Gore as Clinton's veep pick to helping seal the Dayton Peace Accords.

So it was hardly surprising when, the day after the 2010 midterms, Morris, who is now a TV analyst at Fox News, claimed that he'd been indispensable to the Republican landslide. In a thank-you note sent to his 1.7-million-member e-mail list, Morris insisted that the GOP's House majority would be a full "five to ten" seats smaller had it not been for his tireless efforts.

As is so often the case with Morris, this claim requires some scrutiny. Yes, Morris did do consulting work with 28 winning Republican campaigns, while his Super PAC steered funds to an additional 23 Republicans—eleven of whom prevailed. And, to be fair, he also indirectly inspired businessman Ron Johnson to run against, and eventually unseat, Senator Russ Feingold. ("I was sitting at home watching Fox News," Johnson recalled, "and Dick Morris came

on and said, 'Hey, you know, Feingold is vulnerable. You know, if you're a rich guy from Wisconsin, step up to the plate.'")

But when it came to Morris's signature effort, Project 100, the payoff was decidedly mixed. In the run-up to the election, most Republican strategists believed—rightly, as it turned out—that the party had a good shot at about 60 House seats. Morris, however, was convinced that a

much money so quickly.) As November approached, Morris was frantically trying to convince Fox viewers that secure Democrats like Barney Frank and Steny Hoyer were vulnerable—that is, as long as people sent money to Morris-affiliated PACs. "We're knocking off a lot of pawns," he explained on a late September edition of "Fox & Friends." "Let's go for some rooks, castles, and bishops."

In the end, conventional wisdom was right, and he was wrong: Many of the safe Democrats he had targeted won reelection easily. In fact, the bulk of Morris's election work seemed to be little more than an extended exercise in conning his devoted viewers and followers to send him money.



Morris often uses his Fox appearances to drum up business.

much, much larger number was up for grabs, including many solidly Democratic districts. For Morris, the lack of evidence that these races were worth contesting only confirmed his theory: "Nobody considered them in play enough to poll them." And so he called on his supporters to donate \$20 million in just four weeks before the election to spend in these marginal districts. (Never mind that it would be difficult to disburse so

FOX TURNED OUT to be a perfect fit for Morris. He could make the sort of wildly off-base claims he was famous for as a consultant, only no one would remember if, say, he predicted, on the eve of the 2000 election, that Hillary Clinton would lose her Senate race (she did not) or claimed that Arkansas was "leaning Obama" in 2008 (the state went for McCain by 20 points). A few months into Obama's presidency, however, Morris branched out from wrongheaded prognostications and into the outlandish conspiracy theories that were then fueling the nascent Tea Party movement. On Fox, he declared that "those crazies in Montana who say, 'We're going to kill ATF agents because the U.N.'s going to take over'—well, they're beginning to have a case." He pushed the rumor that House Democrat Eric Massa, who was under investigation for sexual harassment, was being targeted as retaliation for voting against health care reform.

Before long, Morris had mastered the art of being a Tea Party celebrity. In the past year, he's appeared at several events sponsored by the right-wing astroturf group Americans for Prosperity—and far from trying to hide the fact that he helped Clinton beat back the conservative tide in the 1990s, he revels in it. “There’s going to be a government shutdown, just like in ’95 and ’96,” he told one raucous crowd in Washington, D.C. “And we’re going to win it this time, and I’m going to be fighting on your side!” At one rally in West Virginia, stumping for Republican House candidate David McKinley, he regaled the crowd with dry polling analysis (“We’re seven points ahead in Washington state . . .”), and, just as the attendees started to doze off, cracked a joke about how Russ Feingold was “unable to find [a safe district to represent] outside of Havana and Caracas.”

It’s possible that the socialist excesses of the Obama administration finally sent Morris over the edge. But perhaps a more plausible explanation is that he’s culling a loyal fan base to whom he can market his growing business empire. In late September, in a brief five-minute stint on “The Sean Hannity Show,” Morris managed to direct viewers to his own website, dickmorris.com, then to a PAC he was affiliated with, AmericansForNewLeadership.com, and, before Hannity could interrupt, he implored the audience to see his new documentary, *Battle for America*. (The film, which sells for \$19.95, features interviews with sober analysts like Ann Coulter, Newt Gingrich, and Lou Dobbs about how Obama is ravaging America, and is punctuated with images of post-apocalyptic landscapes—Morris called it “the WMD of this election.”)

Morris often uses his TV appearances to drum up business for his consulting endeavors. During the health care debate, he would beg people to donate, with pleas like, “We’ve got to stop them. Go to my website and look up how to contribute to run these ads.” (In October 2009, Morris claimed to have raised \$2.5 million for his anti-reform push.) At other times, his rainmaking will take more subtle forms, as when he touts the work of political groups like the League of American Voters—often forgetting to mention that these groups pay him to cut ads. It’s difficult to trace how much money Morris rakes in, all told, though one group he has hyped repeatedly, GOPTrust.com, has paid Morris’s consulting firm at

least \$24,000 for communications work. (Morris did not respond to an interview request.)

At times, Morris’s entrepreneurial activities can reach levels of tawdriness that are stunning even for him. As Media Matters has documented, the conservative website *Newsmax* pays Morris to shill for dubious financial consulting services on his e-mail list (which he builds through Fox appearances). For the low, low price of \$1,495, Morris alerts his followers, they can purchase the “Money Matrix Insider,” which includes instructional DVDs and pointers on how to survive the next financial crisis. Likewise, for \$1,295, subscribers can get stock tips from an analyst billed as the “private financial weapon” of *Newsmax* CEO Christopher Ruddy. For those short on cash, Morris has flagged books like *Aftershock: Protect Yourself and Profit in the Next Global Financial Melt-down*, which advises readers to dump all

their stocks and U.S. bonds and buy up gold. And, in his e-mails and TV appearances, Morris makes sure to give his followers plenty of reason to panic, noting that Democratic policies will produce “massive inflation, even hyperinflation,” although few economists think such a scenario is likely in the near future.

During the 1990s, after Morris’s covert consulting for Bill Clinton was revealed, his biggest conservative supporters were appalled by his shamelessness. But that didn’t stop Morris. He just moved on and found a bigger sucker: the audience of Fox News. Still, even his colleagues sometimes seem taken aback by his appetite for self-promotion. In July, “Fox & Friends” host Brian Kilmeade mocked a recent Morris appearance: “And the third part of Dick Morris’s analysis was, ‘Buy my book, go to my website.’” Morris was no doubt just grateful for the plug.

BRADFORD PLUMER

Lost Generation

The election that made us Japan.

ASKED ON ELECTION EVE to assess the significance of the coming Democratic defeat, Tim Kaine, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, tried to portray this election as fairly typical. “Since Teddy Roosevelt,” Kaine told Gwen Ifill of the “PBS NewsHour,” “the average midterm is, you lose twenty-eight House seats and lose four Senate seats if you’re the party in the White House.” Does losing over 60 House seats and six Senate seats simply make this a below-average outcome—or did something much more serious and significant happen in this month’s election?

Republicans might say it’s the reemergence of a conservative majority, but that’s not really what happened.

What took place on November 2 suggests that the United States may have finally lost its ability to adapt politically to the systemic crises that it has periodically faced. America emerged from the Civil War, the depression of the 1890s, World War I, the Great De-

pression, and World War II stronger than ever—with a more buoyant economy and greater international standing. A large part of the reason was the political system’s ability to provide the leadership the country needed. This election indicates that may no longer be the case.

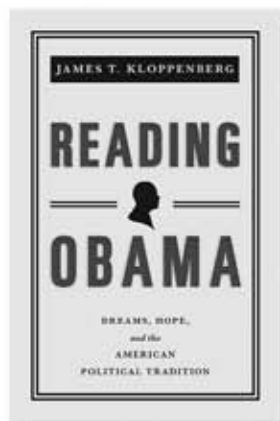


THE CURRENT ECONOMIC downturn structurally resembles the depressions of the 1890s and the 1930s, rather than the cyclical recessions that have recurred since World War II. The American people, mired in debt, with one in six employable adults lacking full-time jobs, are not spending; and businesses, uncertain of demand for their products, are not investing, no matter how low interest rates fall. With the Fed deprived of its principal weapon for boosting the economy, the only way to stimulate private demand and investment is through public spending or (far more inefficiently) by printing trillions. Obama tried to do the former with his initial stimulus program, but it was watered down by tax cuts and undermined by decreases in state spending. By this summer, its effect had dissipated.

The Republicans may not have a mandate to repeal health care, but they do have one to cut spending. Many voters have concluded that Obama’s stimulus program actually contributed to the rise in unemployment and that cutting public spending will speed a recovery. It’s complete nonsense, as the experience of the United States in 1937 or of Japan in the 1990s demonstrated, but it will guide Republican thinking in Congress, and prevent Obama and the Democrats from passing a new stimulus program. Republicans will accede to tax cuts, especially if they are skewed toward the wealthy, but these tax cuts can be saved rather than spent. They won’t halt the slowdown.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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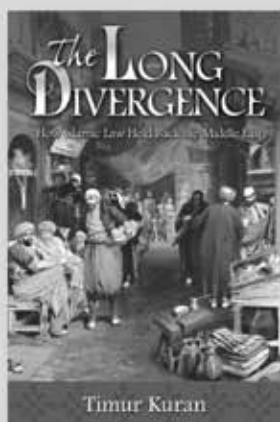
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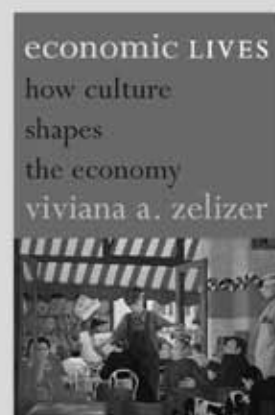
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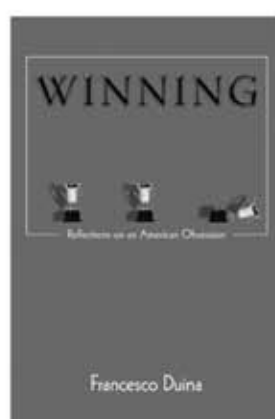
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Reflections on an American Obsession

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"*Winning* offers a penetrating journey into our competitive spirit. It challenges our everyday assumptions about the good life and how we pursue, but seldom attain, happiness. Arguing that much needs to change about the American mindset, this book will interest anyone willing to step back and reflect on what has clearly become a national obsession."

—Emil M. Dabora, Harvard Management Company

Cloth \$32.50 978-0-691-14706-2

And that's only what one can expect over the next few years. Like the depressions of the 1890s and 1930s, this slowdown was also precipitated by the exhaustion of opportunities for economic growth. America's challenge over the next decade will be to develop new industries that produce goods and services that can be sold on the world market. The United States has a head start in biotechnology and computer technology, but, as the Obama administration recognized, much of the new demand will focus on the development of renewable energy and green technology. The Chinese, Japanese, and Europeans understand that these sorts of industries require government coordination and subsidies. The new generation of Republicans, however, reject this kind of industrial policy. They even reject Obama's obviously successful auto bailout.

Instead, when the United States finally recovers, it is likely to re-create the older economic structure that got the country into trouble in the first place: dependence on foreign oil to run cars, a bloated and unstable financial sector that primarily feeds upon itself and upon a credit-hungry public, boarded-up factories, and huge and growing trade deficits with Asia. These continuing trade deficits, combined with budget deficits, could finally reduce confidence in the dollar to the point where it ceases to be a viable international currency.

The election result will also put an end to Obama's attempt to reach an international climate accord. It will cripple his ability to adopt domestic limits on carbon emissions. And it could doom the administration's one substantial foreign policy achievement: the arms treaty it signed with Russia that still awaits Senate confirmation. In other areas, Obama will be able to act without having to seek congressional approval. But there is little reason to believe that this class of Republicans will be helpful in formulating a tough policy toward an increasingly arrogant China, extricating America from Afghanistan, and using U.S. leverage to seek a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

THERE IS PLENTY of blame to go around for the fix that the country is in. Out of power, the Republicans are the party of reactionary insurrection. They have little that's constructive to offer the country, and they have successfully frustrated Obama's efforts at every turn. But Obama has to share some of the blame. Structural crises like the Civil War or the two great

depressions present presidents with formidable challenges, but also great opportunities. If they fail, they discredit themselves and their party, as Hoover did after 1929; but if they succeed, as McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt did after 1896 or Franklin Roosevelt did after 1932, they not only help the country, but also create enduring majorities for their party.

To succeed requires some knowledge of the task at hand, which Hoover did not have; it also requires a vulnerable opposition, which Franklin Roosevelt had and which Obama certainly had in the first months of his presidency, when Republicans were in disarray and Wall Street was disgraced. Two things are then required of a president: bold and unprecedented initiatives that address the underlying economic problems and a populist—and sometimes polarizing—politics that marshals support for these initiatives and disarms the opposition. Obama failed on both counts: His economic program—no matter how large in comparison to past efforts—was too timid, as many liberal economists recognized; and he proved surprisingly inept at convincing the public that even these efforts were necessary.

The election results amply illustrated Obama's political failure. Economic downturns invariably awaken the populist demon inside the American psyche. Americans come to see themselves as part of an embattled middle class—from the clerk at Wal-Mart to the small businessman—that does the work and plays by the rules but is taken advantage of by illegal immigrants, welfare cheats, pointy headed state bureaucrats, Wall Street speculators, and ruthless robber barons. Right-wing populists tend to point their finger mainly at the underserving poor and the government that serves them; left-wing populists usually focus on Wall Street and CEOs. During the Great Depression, Roosevelt was able to direct Americans' ire primarily at the "economic royalists." But Obama, who was uncomfortable with the rhetoric of populism and apportioned blame to Main Street as well as Wall Street, left a political vacuum that the right-wing populists of the Tea Party filled. They even managed to portray Obama and the Democrats as the patrons of Wall Street. When asked who was most to blame for "current economic problems," a plurality of voters said "Wall Street bankers" rather than George W. Bush or Barack Obama.

But, amazingly, these voters backed Republicans by 56 percent to 42 percent. That testifies to the utter failure of the Obama administration's politics.

The other telltale sign of Obama's failure was the youth vote. Democratic victories in 2006 and 2008 very much depended upon increased support from and turnout among young voters. In 2008, Obama's organization specifically targeted these voters. In this election, voters aged 18 to 29 again favored Democrats, by a whopping 57 percent to 40 percent in House races. But they constituted only 11 percent of the electorate this year, compared to 18 percent in 2008 House races and 13 percent in 2006. Obama and his political aides recognized that this was a problem, and, in the last weeks of the election, tried to rouse these voters (hence all those campus rallies and Obama's appearance on "The Daily Show"). But it was too late.

The damage was done soon after Obama took office, when he and his political aides decided to disband the huge, locally based political organization they had created. Obama for America became Organizing for America and was eventually folded into the Democratic National Committee. But it proved toothless, as Ari Berman explains in *Herding Donkeys*, an excellent account of the rise and fall of Obama's organizing efforts.

REPUBLICANS CAN certainly make the case that this election cuts short the kind of Democratic majority that Ruy Teixeira and I foresaw in our 2002 book, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. But they would not be justified in suggesting that it revives the older Republican majority. The Republicans remain (as they were after the 2008 election) a bitterly divided party without an accepted national leadership. You essentially have Karl Rove, Haley Barbour, Mitt Romney, and Mitch McConnell on one side; and the Tea Parties, Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, and Glenn Beck on the other. The Republican National Committee is virtually defunct.

In 1994, when the Republicans won Congress, the election was not only a repudiation of the Clinton administration, but also an affirmation of the Republican alternative. According to one poll, 52 percent of voters approved, and only 28 percent disapproved, of "Republican Congressional leaders' policies and plans for the future." This election, how-



ever, was not a victory for the Republicans, but a defeat for Obama and the Democrats. According to exit polls, 52 percent of voters in House races had an unfavorable view of the Republican Party and only 42 percent had a favorable view. I found this myself in interviewing suburban Philadelphia voters just before the election. Even those who said they were Republicans had grave doubts about what the party stood for and regarded the Tea Partiers as “wackos.”

The election results represented only a modest shift in existing loyalties. Democrats retained, but at somewhat reduced proportion, the loyalties of blacks, Latinos, and professionals (evidenced by their 51 percent to 47 percent margin among those with postgraduate degrees); they lost ground among older and working-class white women, but the gender gap endured; and they suffered from reduced turnout among young voters. Republicans sharply increased their margin among white voters without college degrees, who made up 39 percent of the electorate. In 2008 House races, Republicans carried this group by 54 percent to 44 percent; this year, it was 63 percent to 34 percent. In other words, the Republicans did much better with their coalition than the Democrats did

with theirs; but the contours remained the same.

WHERE DOES THIS leave American politics? If the downturn continues unabated—and it might—and if the Republicans can control their radical right (the way Reagan co-opted the Christian Right in 1980 and 1984), and if they nominate and unite behind someone like Mitt Romney in 2012, and if Obama doesn’t revive the movement that carried him to the White House in 2008, the GOP could win back the presidency. But if I am right about the fundamental problems that the nation suffers from at home and overseas, then any politician’s or political party’s victory is likely to prove short-lived. If you want to imagine what American politics will be like in the long run, think about Japan.

Japan had a remarkably stable leadership from the end of World War II until its bubble burst in the 1990s. As the country has stumbled over the last two decades, unable to extricate itself from its economic slump, it has suffered through a rapid succession of leaders, several of whom, like Obama, have stirred hopes of renewal and reform, only to later create disillusionment and

despair within the electorate. From 1950 to 1970, Japan had six prime ministers. It has had 14 from 1990 to the present, and six from 2005 to the present. That kind of political instability is both a cause and effect of Japan’s inability to transform its economy and international relations to meet the challenges of a new century.

The United States does not have a parliamentary system. Its politics have generally been characterized by long-term realignments in which one party dominates for a decade or more. But lately, such realignments have not come to pass. In 2001, Karl Rove believed that George W. Bush had created a new McKinley majority that would endure for decades; and when Obama was elected, many Democrats, including me, thought he had a chance to create a Roosevelt-esque Democratic majority. Instead, like Japan, we’ve had a succession of false dawns, or what Walter Dean Burnham once called an “unstable equilibrium.” That’s not good for party loyalists, but it’s also not good for the country. America needs bold and consistent leadership to get us out of the impasse we are in. And if this election says anything, it’s that we’re not going to get it anytime soon.

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The Global Imam

What does the leader of the world's most influential Islamic movement really want?

SUZY HANSEN

THE LEADER OF what is arguably the world's most successful Islamic movement lives in a tiny Pennsylvania town called Saylorsburg, at the Golden Generation Worship and Retreat Center, otherwise known as "the Camp." The Camp consists of a series of houses, a community center, a pond, and some tranquil, woodsy space for strolling. From this Poconos enclave—which resembles a resort more than the headquarters of a worldwide religious, social, and political movement—Fethullah Gülen, a 69-year-old Turkish bachelor with a white moustache, wide nose, and gentle, sad expression, leads perhaps five million followers who, in his spirit if not his name, operate schools, universities, corporations, nonprofits, and media organs around the globe.

Last spring, I visited the center and was warmly shepherded around by Bekir Aksoy, the president of the Camp. Just past a checkpoint, a portly Turkish man in a "Sopranos"-esque tracksuit was stretching, preparing for a jog. Along a road leading to the pond, we encountered a group composed mostly of Turkish men who had come from Japan to see Hocaefendi, as Gülen is respectfully called by his followers; they had been escorted onto the premises by a Columbia University student in a white Mercedes. The guest of honor for the day was a professor from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. He was fishing for trout.

The three-story building where Gülen lives resembles a cozy ski lodge. The first floor features a large, sunny breakfast room with a number of long tables. Three men sat at these tables, quietly talking. One greeted me and introduced himself. He was a journalist for a once-admired, now-defunct, Turkish political magazine; the others were Turkish businessmen.

Upstairs, on the hushed second floor, about 15 young men sat on divans against the windows and on the carpeted floors, reading. One had a laptop; he looked up and smiled, as did some others, but a few scowled at me. We were clearly disturbing them. When a young man suddenly stood up and whispered something to Aksoy, I could have sworn he was complaining about my presence. Aksoy seemed to admonish him. Later, I asked, "Was that young man upset that I was there?" "Our people do not complain," Aksoy replied. "They obey commands completely."

Fethullah Gülen lives on the third floor of the lodge, but I hadn't come expecting to see him. Gülen is ill, I was told, and only sees journalists when he has something specific to say. He stays abreast of the news through summaries that are provided to him each day by assistants. Sometimes, these assistants, fearful of upsetting him—Gülen is famously sensitive—try to shield him from the harshest events. Yet despite his limited contact with the world, a sense of his wisdom persists. "He knows everything," Aksoy told me.

In a 2008 online poll devised by the British magazine *Prospect* and the American magazine *Foreign Policy*, Gülen was voted the most significant intellectual in the world. Graham Fuller, a former CIA agent and the author of several books on political Islam, says that Gülen is leading "one of the most important movements in the Muslim world today." Yet there is much

about him that is not known. One of the biggest mysteries is how much sway he holds over his followers. Some visit Pennsylvania as much as once a month; what do they want from their visits? At the end of my tour, as Aksoy was driving me back to a McDonald's near the Camp where I had left my car, I asked him whether Gülen tells people what to do.

"He would never tell; he *suggests*," Aksoy replied. "And then what do people do with that suggestion?" I asked. "Let me put it this way," he said. "If a man with a Ph.D. and a career came to see Hocaefendi, and Hocaefendi told him it might be a good idea to build a village on the North Pole, that man with a Ph.D. would be back the next morning with a suitcase."

LIKE MANY FOREIGN JOURNALISTS based in Istanbul, I first became acquainted with the Gülen movement through a group called the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF), which invites foreign journalists to seminars on political topics and generally serves as the Gülenists' unofficial p.r. firm. At the time, new to the country, I didn't know the JWF was a Gülen-linked group. (In fact, Gülen serves as its honorary president.)

But it wasn't just the JWF. As I became more acquainted with Turkey, it began to seem as if everything there was somehow linked to Gülen. Not only NGOs, businesses, and schools, but also people. "This article is good," I would say. "Yes, but you know, that writer is Gülen," would come the reply. Sometimes, calling someone "Gülen" seemed to reflect fear or prejudice, and pinning down whether or not any given organization was tied to the Gülen movement was rarely a simple matter. As someone at the Rumi Forum in Washington—another organization where Gülen serves as honorary president—put it, "If you say you are in [the Gülen movement], if you say that at 12:20, and say you are out at 12:21, you are out." One Turkish acquaintance joked to me, "Who knows? Every day, when I go to the bakery or get my groceries, I could be giving money to Gülen. Who knows!" "They're everywhere" is a common refrain. At times, suspicions about the Gülenists sound like anti-Semitism—they run the media, they're rich, they stick together, they only help their own.

If you ask Gülenists—who blanch at the words "follower" and "member"—as well as the term "Gülenist" (in Turkish, the term is *Fethullahçı*, referring to his first name)—they will call themselves a "faith-based, civic society movement" or a "volunteers movement" made up of people who admire the thoughts and writings of Gülen. They are an organic network of people, they say, whose goal is to do good works at Gülen's noble behest while spreading his message of love and tolerance, as well as his vision of Islam. According to academics who have studied the movement, there are, more or less, three levels of involvement: sympathizers, who admire Gülen; friends, who, to some degree, support or work for the movement; and the *cemaat*, or community, the core adherents who are closest to Gülen himself.

The Gülen movement reminds people of everything from Opus Dei to Scientology to the Masons, Mormons, and Moonies.

Mark Juergensmeyer, an expert on international religious movements, says that the Gülenists echo the Muhammadiyah of Indonesia, the Soka Gakkai of Japan, and various Indian guru-led or political-religious groups. I've seen Gülen referred to as the Turkish Billy Graham. "If you look at some of their educational work, they remind me of Quakers and missionaries who went off to Africa," says Bill Park of King's College, London, a scholar who has written about the group, "but if you go all the way to the other end, it is a political movement as well."

Gülen's views are moderate and modern. He is fiercely opposed to violence and enthusiastic about science. According to Gülen, "avoiding the physical sciences due to the fear that they will lead to heresy is childish." He is emphatically not a radical Islamist. "The lesser jihad is our active fulfillment of Islam's commands and duties," he has written, and "the greater jihad is proclaiming war on our ego's destructive and negative emotions and thoughts ... which prevent us from attaining perfection." He has exhorted women to take off their headscarves, a ritual he considers "of secondary importance," in order to attend university in compliance with Turkey's secular laws. His followers run nonprofit organizations that promote peace, tolerance, and interfaith dialogue, and Gülenist businessmen devote their resources to building secular schools.

It's no surprise, then, that Gülen has many admirers in the West. "It's a civic movement," says Islam scholar John Esposito, one of many American academics who praise the Gülenists. "It's an alternative elite within Turkish society, as in many Muslim societies, that can be modern, educated, and successful, but also religiously minded." Particularly after September 11, Gülen's movement had a lot of appeal in the United States, which was suddenly desperate for "good Muslims." "It was 2003, two years after 9/11; we were just in the beginning of the Iraq war, and here's this ecumenical Muslim movement that seems to be open to modernity and science and is focused on education," said one senior U.S. government official who has had dealings with Gülenists. "It seemed almost too good to be true."

FETHULLAH GÜLEN was born in 1941 in a village outside of the eastern city of Erzurum. He began praying when he was four years old, and learned Arabic from his father. At school, he met students of the Kurdish intellectual Said Nursi, and effectively joined Nursi's

movement, which was similar to a Sufi brotherhood. He became a state-licensed imam in 1958, and, after his military service, moved to İzmir. In 1969, he began preaching his own version of Nursi's ideas. Soon, he acquired a following.

With the help of Turkish businessmen, Gülen began building dorms, or "light-houses." At the time, Turkey was urbanizing at a breakneck pace. Country kids often floundered, socially and financially, when they moved to the big cities. The "lighthouses" provided a religious community for these young people, one that offered help with academics and didn't, say, watch porn or get carried away with leftist causes.

Within these safe havens, the Gülen movement introduced the pious to the possibilities of modern life. "My father

ple to go abroad and get doctorates in science. He instilled in his followers an almost Calvinist work ethic. To this day, even detractors of the movement will talk about how hard Gülenists work.

Their achievements have been remarkable. In 1983, Gülen's followers founded a conglomerate called Kaynak Holding, which today includes some 15 companies involved in the retail, I.T., construction, and food industries. The main division, Kaynak Publishing, maintains 28 publishing labels. It produces hundreds of books per year on and by Gülen, in addition to books on subjects like Sufism and Ottoman history. Kaynak Publishing's office, a beautiful white stone mansion and mosque that sits on a hill on the Asian side of Istanbul, also houses Akademi. According to the sociologist Joshua

"No society would tolerate this big of an organization being this untransparent."

was a teacher in a primary school. His father was a stonecutter," says Kerim Balci, a journalist who works for the newspaper *Zaman*, which is owned by Gülenists and claims to have the largest readership in Turkey. "And here I am a Ph.D. student, columnist, and academician probably earning my father's yearly salary in a month." Balci's life story—he hails from the small Black Sea city of Samsun, yet went on to receive his master's from a university in Israel and is working toward his Ph.D. from Durham University in Britain—echoes the trajectory of many middle-aged Gülen followers from conservative families. The Turkish state had been founded on the notion that modernity meant rejection of religion—and, for a long time, it was dominated by a military and a political class that enforced this ideal, sometimes harshly. Gülen suggested there was an alternative path. "It may be possible to be both religious and a TV commentator," Balci says.

Gülenists also started to found schools. Students at these schools needed books and other materials, and from İzmir, the Gülen community began building publishing companies and creating audio-cassettes of Gülen's sermons. Stores that are now called "NT" started to sell these materials; today, there are 110 such stores in Turkey and other countries. By the 1980s, the statist economy had opened up and restrictions on religious groups had eased. The Anatolian middle class began to start businesses and make money. Gülen encouraged his peo-

Hendrick, who spent eleven months researching the Gülen movement and whose dissertation is perhaps the most comprehensive independent analysis of it, Akademi constitutes the movement's "central ideational node," the intellectual leaders closest to Hocaefendi himself.

In 1986, Gülenists acquired *Zaman*. Feza Media Group, which publishes the newspaper, also operates an English edition, *Today's Zaman*, a news agency, and the magazine *Aksiyon*. In addition, Feza is connected to Samanyolu Broadcasting, which operates several TV stations. (Here is how a spokesman for the JWF describes the relationship between Gülen, Kaynak, and Feza: "Kaynak Holding and Feza Media Group can be considered Gülen-inspired companies. None of these companies are controlled by Gülen or have any direct link with him. As with all Gülen-inspired projects, Gülen simply provides inspiration, motivation, vision, and some guiding and overarching principles.") In 1996, according to University of Houston sociologist Helen Ebaugh, who has studied the movement, men encouraged by Gülen established Bank Asya, now Turkey's largest Islamic bank, with billions of dollars in assets. Meanwhile, TUSKON, a Turkish businessmen's association, boasts 50,000 companies as members. ("Most of our members admire Gülen," says Hakan Taşçı, the group's Washington, D.C., representative.) In 2002 came a charity called Is Anybody There?, which distributes international aid—and whose sponsors

include *Zaman*, Bank Asya, TUSKON, and other Gülen-inspired groups. According to Ebaugh, Gülenists generally give between 5 percent and 20 percent of their income to the movement's projects; she met one businessman who gave \$3.5 million annually. Every year, something called the International Gülen Conference takes place in a different city; in November 2010, the Niagara Foundation, whose honorary president is Fethullah Gülen, with the help of an assortment of universities, will sponsor the event at the University of Chicago. These conferences are often keynoted by respected intellectuals such as Reza Aslan, the popular writer on Islam.

Even as the movement has sprouted numerous organizations and companies, the schools have remained at the center of the Gülen orbit. Starting with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Gülen dispatched his students to the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, where he rightly suspected that they might find some post-communist youths in need of religion. But it is not just Central Asia that hosts Gülen schools. They also exist in far-flung Muslim countries like Indonesia, Sudan, and Pakistan, as well as mostly non-Muslim countries like Mexico and Japan. In total, according to Ebaugh, Gülenists operate over 1,000 explicitly secular schools and universities in more than 100 countries. They emphasize science and technology, teach the Turkish language, and, by many accounts, are very good schools. Gülenist businessmen build these institutions and sponsor scholarships to them. Whenever you ask who's funding anything, Gülenists reply "a group of Turkish businessmen," "a Turkish businessman," "a Turkish-American businessman," or "our Turkish friends."

When I recently visited Afghanistan, I was surprised to learn that Turks had been operating schools there since the '90s, even during the Taliban era. They currently have schools not just in Kabul, but in Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Sheberghan, and Kandahar. Behind the lovely painted-pink school in Kabul were dorms where kids from all over the country sat outside, some of them eager to say hello in English. Every Afghan I spoke to in Kabul, from politicians to cooks, told me that "the Turkish school" was the best in the city. As we left the premises, the teachers gave my Afghan translator some books by Fethullah Gülen.

IN FEBRUARY 2009, the Texas finals for the Turkish Language Olympiad took place in Houston. Hundreds of

students were competing to land spots in the final round, which is held annually in Ankara, and attracts contestants from 115 countries. In the George R. Brown Convention Center, 2,500 spectators cheered and waved American and Turkish flags. The hosts of the competition, two Fox-affiliate TV personalities, were both decked out in "traditional Turkish" costumes. "How do you like my outfit?" Mike Barajas called out to the crowd. "He looks like a king, doesn't he?" Melissa Wilson drawled. "We will have four students reciting poems," Barajas said. "In *Turkish*. How about that?"

Barajas and Wilson enthusiastically mispronounced Turkish words but did much better with the names of the young contestants, mainly because many of the Texas kids participating in the event—singing Turkish ballads, performing Black Sea folk dances—were Latino and black. As one of the young contestants, Dante Villanueva, recited a very long Turkish poem—earnestly and fluently teasing out the awkward 35-syllable words—middle-aged Turkish men in the audience wept.

There's a decent chance that Dante Villanueva, like many of the other kids in the competition, attended a Gülen charter school. Such schools—many with fuzzy-happy names like Harmony, Magnolia, Pinnacle, and Amity—are only part of the cornucopia of cultural offerings that the movement has brought to the United States. Houston, one of the country's major Gülen hubs, is home to the Gülen Institute; the Raindrop Turkish House, which sponsors the Olympiad; and the Institute for Interfaith Dialog. ("Many participants of the Institute's activities are inspired by the discourse and pioneering dialogue initiatives of the Turkish Muslim scholar, writer and educator Fethullah Gülen," is how the interfaith institute's website explains the connection.) There are similar organizations across the country. Both Raindrop and the interfaith institute are housed in a 30,000-square-foot building called the Turquoise Center that looks like something you might see in Istanbul. Inside, photos of Madeleine Albright, Kofi Annan, and James Baker—all of whom have participated in the Gülen Institute's luncheons and lectures—proudly hang on the walls. At the back of the building is a mosque. Last year, the building hosted a Houston mayoral debate.

Alp Aslandoğan and Ali Candir—respectively, the president of the interfaith institute and the executive director of Raindrop—took me on a tour and showed me the sketches for their new facilities. Among other things, they

planned construction of a mosque, a synagogue, and a church, as well as replicas of the library from Ephesus and the Trojan horse of Troy. All it needed was a sign that said *TURKEYLAND* on it, and they could start charging. "Who's paying for all this?" I asked. "A Turkish businessman," they replied.

I asked to see a Gülen-affiliated charter school and was brought to the Harmony Science Academy, a K-12 school and one of 33 charter schools operated across Texas by a group called the Cosmos Foundation. (At both Harmony and another charter school I visited in Washington, D.C., people told me they were nervous about having their schools labeled Gülen institutions. At the same time, almost all of the Turkish men I met at these schools said they sympathized with or were followers of Gülen.) "Did you wonder why this school was founded by a bunch of Turkish men?" I asked the three mothers who'd been dispatched to give me a tour. "Totally oblivious, didn't even think about it!" a tall, energetic woman named Colleen O'Brien immediately replied in her undulating Texas accent. In a subsequent e-mail, O'Brien would tell me that she was "aware that some of the Harmony staff believe in the teachings of Gülen," but said she had been involved in the school for four years and had never seen any evidence of a "hidden agenda." Indeed, each of the mothers was completely enthusiastic about Harmony. And the school *was* lovely. The couches in the foyer were unmistakably Turkish; I had seen ones just like them in homes in Istanbul. Everything was strikingly clean. I noticed that one of the Turkish teachers spoke rather broken English, but this hardly seemed to matter. "My kid will know better than to schedule a business lunch during Ramadan!" said O'Brien at one point. "I didn't even know what that was until now!"

In recent months, some Gülen schools in the United States have attracted bad press in local papers, amplified by Islamophobic hysteria on blogs. But both Houston and Texas charter-school officials told me that they had not received any complaints about Gülen charter schools, and, in fact, many of the schools were high performers compared to others in the state. The public funding of charter schools prohibits religion classes, and the Houston Turks I met seemed careful to leave their beliefs at home.

On the way to the airport, Ali Candir, the Raindrop Turkish House director, tried to explain his own motivation as a Gülenist. Candir had married a Mexican Muslim when he was establishing a secondary school in Mexico City, an

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experience he spoke of with sincere and touching nostalgia. “Hocaefendi used to say the idea was that Turkey was once very successful, and then it became so badly considered in the world,” he said, echoing the painful feelings of lost empire that so many Turks nurture. “You had to do something. You cannot expect to sit in one place and things will change. You have to go off and try and represent your culture and values in a good way.” Candir’s statement captured a decency that characterizes many of Gülen’s followers. Why, then, are so many Turks so wary of them?

IN APRIL 2010, I went on a JWF-sponsored jaunt to Adana, a city in Turkey’s south, with a group of journalists who had, a month earlier, taken a trip to Senegal on the JWF’s dime. Our bus arrived at the offices of a local health care NGO; there, we were greeted by some 15 men in suits who proceeded to show us a film about hospitals they were sponsoring in Senegal and Congo. The film was set to melodramatic music and ended on an image of a small black child holding a red balloon with a crescent and star on it—the colors and symbol of the Turkish flag. We then visited a massive high school and a tutoring house in a poor Kurdish neighborhood; had lunch with a group of 20 businessmen who donate \$12,000 per month to Senegal; stopped by the local Gülenist newspaper offices; and listened to a panel about media and Turkish society. Everywhere we went, we were given some sort of trophy or vase or sweet.

The last event on the agenda was billed as a “dinner,” but, when we arrived, I realized it was more of a convention sponsored by a TUSKON-affiliated group. About 400 people—almost all of them men—were seated at dinner tables in a ballroom. A large stage and screen had been set up at the front. I was seated at one of the only female tables, a half-empty one. Another film with maudlin music boomed to life.

Suddenly, I heard my name. The woman next to me pushed me to get up. Stunned, I stumbled to the front of the room, and found myself shaking hands with some Turkish businessman while I accepted another gift, cameras flashing. I suspected that, someday, this photo would pop up in a Gülenist brochure, with me heralded as another of the movement’s many sympathizers. I turned, exasperated, to a JWF representative. He laughed at me. “Oh, no, now you’re part of the movement too!” he joked. “It might ruin your career!”

At that moment, I viscerally understood why the Gülenists make so many

people in Turkey uncomfortable. It wasn’t a question of their religious beliefs, or even their earnest, if perhaps overdone, sense of Turkish patriotism, which sends them to Texas and Senegal to promote their culture. No, it was something else: something about the way they have gone about accumulating and wielding power, while setting up what many Turks see as a parallel society.

In 2000, Fethullah Gülen was charged with running a covert operation that threatened the integrity of the Turkish state. The year before, a video had surfaced in which Gülen said: “You must move in the arteries of the system, without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach all the power centers. . . . You must wait until such time as you have gotten all the state power, until you have brought to your side all the power of the constitutional institutions in Turkey. . . . Until that time, any step taken would be too early, like breaking an egg without waiting the full 40 days for it to hatch.” Gülen denied the charges, and claimed the video had been tampered with. (His defense was certainly plausible, given the military’s crackdown on various religious groups in the late 1990s.)

Around that time, Gülen, who was suffering from health problems, left for America, where he has lived ever since. In 2001, he applied for a green card. After much wrangling with the Department of Homeland Security, and with the signed support of American luminaries like former ambassador to Turkey Morton Abramowitz, he got it. He was acquitted of all charges of conspiracy in Turkey in 2006.

By then, the tables had begun to turn in Turkish politics. The authoritarian heyday of the secularists and their allies in the military was over. With the rise to power of the religious Justice and Development Party (AKP)—and, in particular, its charismatic and savvy leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—the secular elites were now on the defensive. Erdoğan was not himself a Gülenist. But both he and the movement had a common enemy in the old elites. Theirs was a natural alliance. And so the Gülenists, once a target of the Turkish state, now found themselves in a position of power—or so it seemed to the many secular Turks who would, in the years to come, gradually grow more and more paranoid about them.

In 2007, Turkish police began arresting members of something called the Ergenekon organization for planning to foment chaos that would bring down the AKP government. More than 200 nationalist and secularist characters—from ex-

military officers to journalists to university rectors—were arrested, and many of them are still in jail. Newspapers reported that Ergenekon had plotted to kill Armenians, Kurds, religious leaders, and Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, among others. The AKP, the Gülenist media, and many liberals—who were tired of the way the secular nationalists had thwarted democracy for generations—welcomed the trials.

And many of the accused were, in fact, thugs who had long terrorized Kurds, Armenians, leftists, and others with their uniquely insane brand of Turkish ultra-nationalism. But some argued that among the accused were innocent targets of the AKP, which was trying to strike a final blow against the secularist elite. When policemen raided the house of Türkân Saylan—a doctor, feminist activist, and staunch secularist who at the time was dying of breast cancer—suspicions about the investigation intensified. Moreover, none of the people arrested as part of the investigation has ever actually been convicted. Turkey scholar Gareth Jenkins has argued that there is no proof that the Ergenekon organization “as described in the indictments actually exists.” Yet since Ergenekon, there have been other similar cases, mostly targeting former military officers.

There was no evidence that the Gülenists had played any role in the Ergenekon arrests, but that did not stop many Turks from being suspicious. The Gülenist media were some of the loudest champions of every odd detail propagated about the Ergenekon gang. Meanwhile, it became conventional wisdom in Turkey that there were significant numbers of Gülenists in the police force. “It is no secret that politically-motivated judicial cases such as the Ergenekon investigation are primarily driven by members of the Gülen movement, both in the police and the judicial system and in the media,” argued Jenkins.

The senior American government official who described the warm reception given to the Gülenists after September 11 says that while the movement seemed benevolent at first, “then it became clearer they had penetrated the intelligence apparatus of the Turkish National Police and that they were using it for some purpose, clearly for wiretaps and leaks to newspapers.” “There has been, or is now, a long march through the institutions,” says Bill Park of King’s College. “Even in places like the foreign ministry, it seems that Gülenists are starting to appear. What a lot of people tell me, in a way that I am starting to believe, is that they set up parallel structures within government institutions

which might sometimes bypass the official structure of which they are part.”

The Gülenists deny these allegations, claim to support the Ergenekon arrests in the name of democracy, and suggest that there is nothing suspicious about the fact that followers of Gülen now work inside the state apparatus. And indeed, it often seems that both sides in Turkish politics—the old secular elite and the new religious elite—are given to paranoid thinking about their opponents.

What is undeniable, though, is that the Gülenists have not helped their case by eschewing transparency. So little is known about how the movement is structured, or whether it is structured at all. “No society would tolerate this big of an organization being this untransparent,” says Hakan Altınay, the former executive director of the Open Society Foundation (OSF) in Istanbul. “There needs to be more information about who they are, what they are doing—mission statement, board, and some kind of financial statement.” Columnist Aslı Aydintaşbaş, who praises the Gülen-linked schools and the movement’s moderate version of Islam, nevertheless notes that “they’re not a political party, so I can’t vote them in and vote them out.” Süheyl Batum, an expert on constitutional law and the former president of Istanbul’s Bahçeşehir University, puts it this way: “I don’t think a group this influential and closed is good for democracy.”

Gülenists have a number of replies to these complaints about transparency. Some admit that the movement may need to become more transparent, but others take a harder line. When I told a group of men at the JWF that their critics wanted them to properly label themselves as part of the Gülen movement, one of them replied heatedly, “Why? I support the ideas of Gülen, and I support the ideas of Kant. Should I wear a sign that says I support the ideas of Kant?” Sometimes, they also justify their evasiveness by citing a fear of persecution. But that defense seems left over from an earlier time, when the secular elites had far more power than they do now.

In fact, a 2009 study published by the OSF and written by Binnaz Toprak, a respected sociologist, well known for her sympathy for the rights of religious people, collected hundreds of interviews with people across Anatolia, many of whom complained that those affiliated with the Gülen movement are discriminating against non-Gülenists. Businessmen feel obligated to sell Gülenist newspapers, and those who do not support the AKP or the Gülen community cannot win state contracts, some respondents alleged.

WHAT DO THE Gülenists want? One Gülenist told me that the movement’s goal was the “betterment of humanity,” but that does not appear to be the whole story. In the beginning, it seemed that the movement was responding to a particular set of circumstances. Gülen discovered that at the center of the secular Turkish Republic was a desperate void. Much of the populace needed something besides Atatürk, or Western values, to believe in. The story of the Gülen movement is thus very much the story of Turkey’s evolution: religious Muslims using capitalist enterprise to establish a foothold in a country where they’d previously been left behind. These Turks were inspired by Gülen’s exhortation to assert themselves as full members of Turkish society. The movement’s “goal is not to establish an Islamic state,” writes Joshua Hendrick. “Such a development would be counter to its real aim, which is social power.” As one Turkish academic said to me back in 2007: “Why would they want to take over the state? They have media, schools, businesses, and the society. What do they need the state for when they have everything else?”

The Gülenists also seem motivated by a sense of nationalism and a desire to burnish Turkey’s image abroad. “What is the impact of, say, African kids learning the Turkish national anthem, of U.S. kids watching soccer games involving the top Turkish teams and being taken on trips to Istanbul?” asks Park. “Turkey doesn’t yet have the broader political, economic, and cultural footprint to follow through on this, but one can wonder whether there is a longer game being played—that the movement is putting Turkey on the map culturally and in advance of a greater Turkish economic and political presence in the longer term.”

Such nationalism may not be particularly problematic. What the Gülenists have yet to reckon with, however, is that when a relatively non-transparent movement starts asserting itself politically, it is going to make people nervous—even some inside the movement. And in recent years, Fethullah Gülen has indeed become a political force in Turkey—powerful and confident enough that he can even contradict his allies in the AKP. This summer, he spoke out against the Turkish flotilla that tried to sail into Gaza, unlike Prime Minister Erdoğan, who praised it. Erdoğan no doubt despised this challenge to his authority. Yet he needs the Gülen movement in his corner. *Zaman*, the TV stations, and the JWF all push the AKP political line, and

they exercise a lot of influence. When an AKP-backed constitutional referendum passed two months ago—with strong support from both Gülen media outlets and Gülen himself—Erdoğan took care to acknowledge the endorsement he’d received from “friends across the ocean.” Everyone in Turkey knew who he was talking about.

Today, justifiably or not, the secularists of Turkey spend their days looking over their shoulders. I have encountered countless people who will no longer talk about Gülen on the phone. Opposition newspapers will not write critically about Gülen; what passes for conventional wisdom among some journalists at these papers will never make it into their pages. Maybe this is mere paranoia, but what I’ve seen across the faces of some secularist-liberals is something closer to fear. “It has become such a power in the government and law enforcement spheres that we in the mainstream media have become somewhat intimidated by this new mythological power they have,” says one Turkish columnist who writes for a major newspaper. “Since the Ergenekon trial, there is an unwritten rule not to criticize Gülen. We do not mess with them. There’s a feeling they can orchestrate a character assassination, and no journalist who cares about their image is willing to take this risk.”

This past summer, a former police intelligence officer named Hanefi Avcı published a book about the Gülen movement. Avcı’s children attended Gülen schools, and he himself had lived in their dorms. In the book, he alleged that the Gülen network had begun to set up a parallel state within the police and judiciary systems. The book caused a sensation. Avcı claimed he had documents to prove his case.

Then, in late September, Avcı was arrested on charges that he had connections to a fringe leftist organization called the Revolutionary Headquarters. Anything is possible, of course, and in Turkey it does seem like there’s always some crazy group waiting to claim new members. But at this point, for the first time, even some of Gülen’s sympathizers began to wonder, publicly, what the hell was going on. Some days later, from the placid Golden Generation Worship and Retreat Center in Pennsylvania, came rare public comments from Hocaefendi himself. In the course of addressing a range of subjects, he responded to Avcı’s allegations, saying, in part, “May God forgive his sins.” ♦

Suzy Hansen is a writer living in Istanbul.



Franken Sense

The very serious senator from Minnesota.

JEFFREY ROSEN

IN JULY 2009, after a cliff-hanger of an election and an ugly court battle over the results, Al Franken finally arrived in the United States Senate. Eager to lay the groundwork for legislative accomplishments, the author of *Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot* looked for common ground with his new GOP colleagues. In the case of Orrin Hatch, the Utah Republican, that common ground was music. In addition to his senatorial career, Hatch is a prolific songwriter—he has written odes to John McCain, America, Hanukkah, and Princess Diana, among other subjects—and so Franken approached him and asked to hear a few tunes. Hatch played a recording of a song called “Headed Home,” which was written before his close friend Ted Kennedy died and had a metaphor about sailing into the ocean. “It was obvious what that was about, and I began to tear up a bit,” Franken told me. Then Hatch played a sad song in which an American wife entreats her husband, a soldier in Kandahar, to “Come Home.” “The waterworks started,” Franken recalled. “I’m a crier.”

To lighten the mood, Hatch broke out a country music number called “Are You Lonely Here With Me?” The song made Franken laugh, and he confessed to Hatch that he had written a humorous country song of his own, “We Stayed Together for the Kids.” He proceeded to sing it for me in an exaggerated Nashville twang:

We stayed together for the kids
And this is what we thought we had to do
But now the kids are up and gone
And there’s just me and there’s just you

Franken explained to Hatch that he wanted the song to conclude with the couple deciding to stay together, despite their many years of bickering. But he needed a bridge to reach this happy ending, and Hatch suggested they write one together. A few weeks later, the pair spent more than an hour brainstorming lyrics and discarding lines they thought weren’t sufficiently funny. Finally, they came up with this: “I’m amazed the kids turned out ok/I’m amazed with you today,” Franken explained, “The verses are all about how they couldn’t stand each other, basically, and all the stuff that went on between them, and then the last verse is sort of like, ‘You got better with age, you grew up a little too/I’ll share my empty nest with you.’ It turns out they’re glad they stayed together.”

I asked Franken the obvious question: Was the song a metaphor? Was he going out of his way to work with Republicans for the good of the kids—that is, the American people? Franken cackled. “I don’t know if I’d go that far—I actually really enjoy a lot of my Republican colleagues,” he said. “And I try to get along with everyone. The Senate is like a small town with a hundred people in it. And each one can put a hold on you.” Warming to his metaphor, Franken grinned mischievously. “It’s a somewhat contentious small town . . . and some members are sometimes trying to slow down what the town is doing when the town really needs to be moving. But what are you going to do? It’s

obviously been a difficult time in certain respects, sometimes it is frustrating . . . but you don’t take it out” on your colleagues.

When Franken launched his campaign for the Senate, it wasn’t obvious that the former comedian and Air America pundit would become a devotee of the rituals of senatorial comity. As an entertainer, Franken had mastered a combative political persona in which he tackled his ideological opponents head-on. Given the opportunity to interview George W. Bush, then a presidential candidate, he asked Bush whether he’d ever manufactured crystal meth. He famously got into a shouting match with Bill O’Reilly at a C-SPAN panel discussion, and, in another of his books, *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them*, he recounted that he’d once called up *National Review* editor Rich Lowry and challenged him to a fight in a parking garage. When Franken arrived in Washington, many expected him to be a bombastic, no-holds-barred partisan.

But Franken has self-consciously chosen a different model: the institutionalist who can achieve bipartisan consensus but also successfully champion liberal legislation. During his brief time in office, Franken has emerged as a throwback to the successful progressives of a distant era when senators knew what they were talking about and spent long hours working on worthy policy proposals to make the lives of their constituents better. As unlikely as it may appear, at a time when it seems as if every politician wants to be a celebrity, Franken has used his celebrity to become a serious senator.

DURING THE ELECTION campaign, Republicans mined Franken’s show-business career for attack ads, taking aim at some of his more risqué “Saturday Night Live” skits and a satirical article he once wrote for *Playboy* about having sex with robots. When it became clear that Franken was going to make it to the Senate, he knew he had to dispel his image as a cutup. He sat down with Hillary Clinton’s chief of staff, Tamara Luzzatto, and asked her how Clinton—who had also arrived in Washington with the advantages and baggage of a celebrity—had developed a reputation as an effective lawmaker. Franken was told “she came to each hearing prepared—she came early and stayed late,” he recalled. After he was assigned to the Judiciary Committee, he diligently followed this advice. Since many of the hearings were perfunctory and uncontroversial, he often found himself alone with the chairman and ranking member, Senators Patrick Leahy and Jeff Sessions. “Sessions would always say, ‘Oh, Al’s here,’” Franken recalls, mimicking Sessions’s Alabama drawl. “I remember once, when Leahy had to leave, I was chairing the hearing, and Sessions said: ‘A meteoric raahz!’” Franken replied, “And well deserved!”

In recent years, congressional hearings have become little more than televised sideshows in which most senators rely on questions scripted by their staff and seem unable to ask tough or even relevant follow-ups. Franken clearly aspires to an older tradition, when lawmakers could think on their feet and were capable of grilling witnesses without aides handing them notes or whispering furtively in their ears. He studies issues exhaus-

tively, which allows him to negotiate directly with senators and their aides rather than intermediaries. His staffers say that he encourages them to challenge him during the murder boards he assembles to prepare for hearings and sometimes insists on staying past midnight.

I saw evidence of Franken's careful preparation firsthand, when I testified in a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing last March on the *Citizens United* campaign-finance case that enabled unlimited corporate spending in election campaigns. One of the witnesses, Bradley Smith, had criticized a provision of a bill Franken had introduced which said that if a foreign national controls more than 20 percent of a company, that company shouldn't be allowed to spend unrestricted amounts on American elections. When Smith confidently stated that 20 percent ownership didn't constitute corporate control, Franken pounced:

FRANKEN: Yes or no, please. Do you know how Delaware, the leading state for corporate law, defines a controlling shareholder?

SMITH: No, I do not, nor do I think it is relevant to the question of whether control ...

FRANKEN: I asked you to respond yes ... or no, sir, and you said no, you do not. ... Now, the fact is that thirty-two states that define control with a number, thirty-one of them define it as twenty percent ownership or less, most of them less.

Franken is not an attorney, but with a few deft questions he had demonstrated that Smith, a law professor, didn't know what he was talking about. "It's clear to me that he could have been a world-class litigator, and his ability to take people down the slippery slope is just fabulous," said his friend Norman Ornstein, a congressional expert at the American Enterprise Institute. "I saw a hearing on health care where a witness was talking about how our system was the best in the world and how awful others are, and Al asked, 'Do you know how many bankruptcies there were as a result of health care in Switzerland?'" When the witness said no, Franken said "[t]he answer is zero," and then went through a list of other countries that had no bankruptcies. "The witness was just filleted," Ornstein said.

On the morning of the second day of confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Elena Kagan, I met Franken at his tastefully decorated townhouse,

which is located a few minutes from the Capitol. He kindly offered me a bagel, but couldn't find a serrated knife to cut it, so he grabbed a butcher's knife instead and brandished it animatedly as he talked about his policy agenda. (Eventually, his wife, Franni, came in and prevented him from injuring both of us.) After the interview, Franni made sure that Franken had remembered his accessories—an aspirin, a pink BlackBerry, keys, and a phone. We piled into the car along with Hazel, a friend from the Upper West Side who had come along for the show. While Franni drove, Franken lamented the jokes he wouldn't be able to make in the hearings for fear of appearing unseemly. (Not all of his fellow senators were so restrained: Franken's colleague from Minnesota, Amy Klobuchar, quizzed Kagan on her opinion regarding "the famous case of *Edward v. Jacob*"—a reference to the *Twilight* vampire movies.) Later that day, the press and the blogosphere focused on the fact that Franken had amused himself during the hearing by doodling a surprisingly good likeness of Sessions, which was captured by an AP photographer.

Most commentators, however, missed Franken's impressively substantive discussion with Kagan over how to protect civil liberties at a time when Comcast, Google, and Facebook have more power than the Supreme Court over privacy and free speech. Franken was especially concerned about the pending merger between NBC and Comcast. Noting that Comcast was the nation's largest cable operator, Franken warned that if the company owned "both the pipes and the programming," it could favor its own

Franken jokes that he'd like to remain in the Senate until he's 118 years old.

content or charge more for it, leading to "fewer voices, and a smaller marketplace of ideas." He explained, "That's a First Amendment problem. It's also an anti-trust problem." Franken's knowledge of this issue dates back to his time at NBC in the 1990s, when an obscure rule change ultimately allowed networks to own, and thus control, most of the content they air, rather than purchase it from independent producers—a move that Franken believes has limited the range of views on television. Franken then asked one of the best questions of the hearings: "Do you believe that the First Amendment could inform

how the government looks at media anti-trust cases?" Although she was unable to comment on the merger, Kagan acknowledged Franken's point: "I guess you could be thinking about that as a kind of policy matter as to whether the authorities that are responsible for approving mergers and such ought to take into account so-called ... First Amendment values."

Franken also used the confirmation hearing to lay out a robust vision of progressive constitutionalism. He attacked a "bare majority" of the Roberts Court for having "used its power to help big business." Taking aim at the *Citizens United* decision, he pointed out that unlimited corporate spending by companies like Standard Oil and GM might have meant the failure of the Clean Water and Clean Air acts of the 1970s, both of which passed around 60 days before an election.

FOR ALL OF HIS EFFORTS to play down his past life as a comedian, Franken frequently deploys humor to bond with Republicans in the Senate. "Every time I vote against a Thune amendment, I go up to him and say, 'John, I voted against you this time, but I swear it's the last time!'" Franken told me gleefully. "I do it every time! And Thune does a very funny Perot; yes he does." Franken added that Kansas Republican Pat Roberts is a "huge" fan of Jack Benny, the vaudevillian comic. "He's really funny—although we never agree on anything—and every time we see each other, we go, 'You again!'" He added, "There are some people here that I have a very fond relationship with that I didn't imagine I would."

Franken has accomplished more in his first year than many Senate freshmen, sponsoring several amendments that became law. One requires health insurance companies to spend 85 percent of premiums on actual medical care, not administrative costs or other expenses. "The medical-loss ratio is one of the things I'm proudest of," Franken told me. Another measure bans the federal government from awarding contracts to employers who require employees to give up their right to sue for sexual harassment or rape at work. (The law was inspired by the case of Jamie Leigh Jones, who accused her co-workers at Halliburton in Baghdad of gang raping her and was forced by Halliburton into secret arbitration.)

However, Franken was less successful when it came to his most ambitious legislative proposal: reining in the credit-rating agencies that helped to create the financial crisis. After reading Michael Lewis's *The Big Short*, Franken became outraged that the rating agencies, which

were in the pocket of the mega-banks, had given triple-A status to securities so complicated that no one understood their true value and which ultimately proved to be worthless. Franken wrote an amendment that would have created a board to randomly assign rating agencies to banks, instead of allowing them to shop around for the agency most likely to whitewash their risky products. The board was also given incentives to favor agencies whose ratings proved the most accurate over time. Although the amendment cleared the Senate with eleven Republican votes, it was opposed by Banking Committee Chairman Christopher Dodd and failed to survive the conference between House and Senate lawmakers.

I asked Franken whether he worried that corporate lobbyists had killed the measure. "It's obviously a problem," he replied. "But lobbyists often represent a major constituency in your state: How do you vote against banking interests in Delaware when half the state is employed" by banks? He laughed wearily. "When there's a very close call, and you don't know how to vote anyway, and there are eight arguments against the thing and eight arguments for it, you might as well go with the way the constituency group of the lobbyist is asking you to ... or what your staff is saying." He added, "I've talked senators out of a vote that their staff had told them one way to vote, and they were completely misinformed. ... On the ratings bill, people were told, 'This is going to give an official U.S. stamp of approval to the credit ratings,' and the opposite was written into the bill!" The failure of the rating-agency amendment also suggests that Franken may have been less effective in persuading his colleagues than he had hoped. His office suggested that I call Hatch and Roberts for testimonials to his bipartisan effectiveness. Neither senator called back.

FRANKEN'S STAFF told me that his ultimate model is not Hillary Clinton but Teddy Kennedy—a

master of working across the aisle to advance an unequivocally liberal agenda. Whether Franken can fill Kennedy's shoes will hinge on his ability to combine legislative skills with a fiery economic populism that is as progressive as the Tea Party's populism is conservative. Although Franken has been a relatively successful institutionalist, he hasn't yet demonstrated Kennedy's ability to bend ideologically in order to cut a deal. (Of course, bipartisan deal-making may also be less possible in today's polarized Senate than it was during Ken-



Franken is an unlikely devotee of the rituals of senatorial comity.

nedy's long tenure in office.)

Economic populism has deep roots in Minnesota, including a string of senators associated with the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party: Hubert Humphrey, Eugene McCarthy, Walter Mondale, and Paul Wellstone. Franken was a close friend of Wellstone's, whose memorial service became so politicized by Norm Coleman and other Republicans that, according to Ornstein, it helped spur Franken to launch his bid for elected office.

Franken's economic outlook was also influenced by his father, who struggled

as a printing salesman in Minneapolis, and by Franni, whom he met when he was a freshman at Harvard. When Franni was an infant, her father, a World War II veteran, died in a car accident and her mother was left a widow with five children at the age of 29. They bought a house in Maine with a G.I. loan. Her mother supplemented her income from the produce department at a grocery store with Social Security. All four girls got college educations, thanks in part to Pell Grants and Defense Department student loans. The experience, which

Franken has described with tears in his eyes, convinced him of the importance of the federal safety net.

I asked Franken what had frustrated him most about his first year in Washington, and he mentioned the defeat, in June, of a Senate bill to extend unemployment insurance benefits to the long-term unemployed. (A version of the bill passed after we spoke.) "I'll go into a union hall and see people whose whole identity is their job—these guys have worked since they were ten years old ... and they haven't had a job in six months, and you see that they're literally depressed." Franken shook his head in disbelief. "I've had guys say to me, 'If it weren't for unemployment insurance ... I wouldn't be in my house,' and then I hear how unemployment insurance incentivizes people not to get jobs," he said. "You hear that, and you think how out of touch that is, and how insensitive it is."

"I want to achieve a lot," he continued. "A real energy policy that takes us

into the future, a transportation policy that gets us focused on things that create prosperity, education, the right kind of infrastructure, and creating the most vibrant, prosperous society we can." Realizing that he was veering into a stump speech, he gave a self-deprecating shrug, and added that he would like to remain in the Senate for a long time, until he's as old as the late Senator Robert Byrd. "It depends how I'm doing at a hundred and eighteen," he explained. "I have this running joke ... that I want to be a senator until I'm so out of it that all I can say is 'how dee doo.'" ♦

Waste Land

The Pentagon's nearly unprecedented, wildly irrational spending binge.

GREGG EASTERBROOK

THIS YEAR, the United States will spend at least \$700 billion on defense and security. Adjusting for inflation, that's more than America has spent on defense in any year since World War II—more than during the Korean war, the Vietnam war, or the Reagan military buildup. Much of that enormous sum results from spending increases under presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Since 2001, military and security expenditures have soared by 119 percent.

For most of that time, of course, the United States has been fighting two wars. Yet that's not the cause of the defense-spending explosion. Even if the costs of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are subtracted, the defense budget has swelled by 68 percent since 2001. (All money figures in this article are stated in 2010 dollars.) The U.S. defense budget is now about the same as military spending in all other countries combined.

In a historically unusual twist, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, a Republican appointee and a former CIA director, has repeatedly acknowledged that military costs are untenable and decried the Pentagon's "culture of endless money." But despite Gates's advocacy, and Obama's backing, not much has changed. Congressional leaders nod in agreement at talk of reform—then demand that their pet projects be fully funded. A recent Gates proposal, received as if it heralded dramatic cuts, seeks merely to constrain Pentagon budget growth to 2 percent to 3 percent over inflation. At that pace, defense and security costs will hit a ruinous \$1 trillion annually by 2030.

Pentagon profligacy is not a new phenomenon. But an ugly melee is brewing regarding America's unsustainable government spending—and defense and security costs cannot be exempted from tough decisions over what the country can and cannot afford. And yet, security spending and military deployment are presented to the nation as virtually untouchable. If the Pentagon wants something, the logic goes, then it must be necessary. This is far from true.

THE UNITED STATES wields more military power relative to other nations than any country has ever known, including Rome at the peak of empire. The vast sums that America spends on defense buy many valuable things: a highly trained and ethical military; sophisticated and wide-ranging counterterrorism efforts; and extensive humanitarian operations, most recently in Haiti, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Furthermore, as Obama noted in a speech at West Point in 2009, the United States does not use its might to acquire territory or seize resources. Instead, the American military pursues what political leaders believe is best for the world. Such beliefs may be wrong, even tragically so. But has any other nation that possessed such overwhelming military force refrained from using it for conquest or pursuit of riches?

That the U.S. military is strong and honorable does not, however, mean the price is justified. Moscow and Washington just shook hands on another nuclear arms reduction agreement. Iran is a cause of enormous stress but does not threaten the

United States. China, vaguely a potential adversary, is mainly on good terms with America. In June, I spoke at a flag officers' forum at the Naval War College in Newport, where Admiral Gary Roughead, the chief of naval operations, explained that naval intelligence believes Beijing's long-term goal is to avoid war: China is building weapons appropriate to defend its coasts, not to contest the United States in the air or on "the blue water." Such indicators, combined with the drawdown in Iraq, suggest the defense budget should be falling, not climbing. Instead, most U.S. defense expenditures are on the rise. As Gates has remarked, "It is reasonable to wonder whether the nation is getting a commensurate increase in capability in exchange for these spiraling costs." This turns out to be a colossal understatement.

ONE REASON spending is soaring is because the United States treats soldiers better than in the past. The largest item in war and security spending, \$300 billion, is for pay and benefits. This is a good thing: If Americans want an all-volunteer military that places the entire burden of risk on the small percentage who serve, then society must treat that group well.

As recently as the Vietnam war, conscripts were treated as chattel. Today, the Army enlistment bonus can be as much as \$40,000. An Air Force master sergeant with ten years experience earns \$42,066, while a major in his tenth year earns \$74,761, plus allowances for housing and food. Top officers increasingly have pay stubs suggesting corporate management, with a lieutenant general in his twentieth year earning \$159,396. Servicemembers can retire as early as age 40 and draw pensions of \$20,000 per year or more—a nice sum for someone positioned to start a new career. And officers' pensions can be spectacular. Afghanistan commander Stanley McChrystal, cashiered at age 56 for talking to *Rolling Stone*, will receive an annual pension of \$149,700 for life.

Then there is what the Defense Department insists on calling the "death gratuity." Once, the family of a fallen soldier received funeral expenses and a meticulously folded flag. Today, the family receives a payment of \$100,000—much more if the person signed up for the subsidized life insurance offered by all the service branches.

In addition to paying servicemembers decent amounts, the United States now spends more on their living conditions and well-being. All military personnel receive housing benefits, and, for the most part, deployed forces don't sleep on the ground and eat beans, as did previous generations of soldiers. Barracks equipped with power, showers, and Internet connections are the norm; dozens of military facilities around the world include U.S. chain stores and restaurants. That's part of the reason that military construction costs have increased over the past decade from about \$10 billion annually to \$20 billion.

The U.S. military also offers generous educational benefits, including 36 months of tuition payments for active-duty military. We should be glad the defense establishment values education and weighs it heavily in promotion: American and Israeli expe-

rience shows that educated militaries are ethical. (Yes, the militaries of both countries have committed crimes, but, in the main, their behavior is exemplary.) Today, when U.S. engineers build an airstrip or port, they may build a university branch, too. At Bagram Airfield in the wilds of Afghanistan, the University of Maryland has a branch right across the parking lot from the Dairy Queen. It's great that, instead of getting bored or into trouble, personnel at Bagram can use their spare time to work on college credits and then reward themselves with an Earthquake Blizzard. But it's also expensive.

Like the rest of the country, the Pentagon is also struggling with spiraling health care costs, which have risen from \$23 billion in 2000 to \$51 billion in 2010. This is in part because servicemembers receive lifetime subsidized care at a family premium of \$460 per year—a fraction of the cost of a comparable private plan. There is also a gruesome calculus at work. A soldier who dies in battle costs society less than a soldier who returns disabled, requiring a lifetime of special payments and medical attention—and medical advances and rapid evacuation mean that many servicemembers who would have died in prior conflicts now survive. We send our forces off to fight, and so we must take care of those who return physically or psychologically harmed. Until such time as America may learn to resolve conflicts without infantry, this dynamic will keep adding to military spending.

WHILE SOME of the causes of rising defense spending are worthy, many are not. The most egregious case is the Pentagon's legendary procurement screwup. These are partly the result of payoffs and corruption scandals, such as those involving Darleen Druyun, a top Air Force procurement officer, and former California Representative Randy "Duke" Cunningham. But there's a more insidious atrophy at work. Pressure-point lobbying has made it hard for the Department of Defense to render final acquisition decisions. Instead, programs are perennially "stretched," becoming more and more expensive while less and less of value is produced.

Exhibit A for this phenomenon is the F-22 fighter jet. Lockheed Martin was chosen as the prime contractor in 1991. But the plane did not become operational for 14 years, as lawmakers scrapped over which congressional districts would receive the subcontracts. While deadlines kept passing, taxpayers paid billions. Through the years of wheel-spinning,

F-22 costs more than doubled in inflation-adjusted terms per plane. The Air Force's entire B-58 project—which produced the world's first long-range supersonic bomber—took six years, from when the prototype first flew in 1956 till the final B-58 left the assembly hangar. Back when Pentagon spending was much lower, there was discipline about completing programs on time.

Eventually, the original justification for the F-22 fighter—anticipated aerial duels above Europe against the Soviet Union's best—faded away, as did the adversary. When the first operational F-22 finally entered an Air Force squadron in 2005, it was unclear what the plane would do, other than be something really cool for members of Congress to have their pictures taken next to. The F-22 has never

In 2004, Lockheed Martin and General Dynamics were funded to build prototypes. Both followed the time-honored procedure of lowballing the cost estimates to get the contract, then running up the price. Six years after the beginning of what was promoted as a quick project, the price per ship has skyrocketed, from perhaps \$300 million to perhaps \$700 million for each small vessel. The project is so fouled up that Maine's Bath Iron Works, which is widely viewed as America's best military shipyard, dropped out.

In 2003, the Defense Department decided to replace the Marine One helicopters that ferry the president, as several of the presidential choppers are based on a design from the 1960s. First, the Pentagon chose a way-too-complex consortium of AgustaWestland, Lockheed

Subtract the costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and defense spending has still grown by 68 percent in ten years.

been used in Iraq or Afghanistan: Either the plane is irrelevant to low-intensity war, or the Air Force fears one will get shot down by some cheap, old-fashioned weapon. The project was finally ended last year, but only after a nasty and protracted fight in Congress.

This is not an isolated example. Since 2002, the Air Force has been trying to build a new tanker. Many U.S. airborne tankers are based on the old 707 jetliner, which Western airlines stopped using a generation ago. The Air Force selected a Boeing replacement, resulting in a lobbying onslaught from Boeing's competitors. The Pentagon dropped its plan and chose a Northrop Grumman–Airbus replacement; Boeing staged a counterattack, and now the Air Force is back to debating between Boeing and Airbus. Eight years after the project began, millions of dollars have been wasted while Pentagon personnel, contractors, and lawyers fought about the deal, but nothing new is flying. The kicker? In 2008, Gates ordered an "expedited" decision.

About a decade ago, the Navy identified a need for a relatively inexpensive corvette that could fight in shallow water. The Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) will control West Africa's coast and assure access to sea lanes. (Military planners hope the United States will wean itself from Persian Gulf oil, which must pass through the perilous Strait of Hormuz, and switch to oil from West Africa, as tankers departing from there sail directly into the open ocean, where the U.S. Navy rules.)

Martin, and Bell. Connecticut-based Sikorsky cried bloody murder to its allies in Congress and got the deal blocked. After Obama took office, he theatrically cancelled the project.

But last winter, the initiative came back. "Cancelled" Pentagon projects are more enduring than brooding teen vampires. Lockheed Martin, a lobbying powerhouse, switched sides and joined Sikorsky to offer a different aircraft, while Boeing purchased the rights to the AgustaWestland design that once appeared to win the contract. The two sides are now at each other's throats on Capitol Hill. Meanwhile, the price of a new Marine One fleet has shot up from \$6 billion just a few years ago to \$11 billion. (Projects "cancelled" because they're too costly invariably become even more expensive after being revived.) The Pentagon now says the new presidential aircraft will not be airborne until sometime between 2017 and 2023. *Twenty years* just to build a helicopter.

ALTHOUGH THE PENTAGON is "awash in reports" on its broken procurement process—as the military's own news agency said in August—little meaningful internal reform has occurred. The latest jet fighter costs nine times as much as the top fighter that flew during the Vietnam war. The latest submarines cost \$7 billion, the latest aircraft carriers \$11 billion. In 2009, the Government Accountability Office estimated that Pentagon weapons projects were collectively \$296 billion over budget.

One reason for these astronomical sums is military infighting, with the services often more focused on turf wars than on finding the ideal solutions to security threats. In 2008, Gates fired the top civilian and military leaders of the Air Force in part because of the service's refusal to focus on close air support for soldiers in Afghanistan, much of which is done by low-speed drones, which bore the Air Force to tears. (The Air Force is much more interested in ultra-zoomy piloted planes like the F-22.) The Army does not trust the Air Force, and so has been arguing with the flyboy service for years about who gets a new cargo aircraft. The Marines don't trust the Army, so they insisted on the expensive V-22 tilt-rotor transport. However, the V-22 has crashed several times and has rarely been used in contested areas of Iraq or Afghanistan. The Marines also want expensive amphibious tanks built exclusively for them, although in the past half-century there have been only a handful of amphibious assaults worldwide. Right now, the Marines are trying to get their tank into "low-rate initial production," a classification synonymous with runaway cost. (It essentially promises that the high initial price will drop as manufacturing volume increases, but that rarely happens in practice.)

The next big jet fighter project is the F-35, which was sold to the Clinton White House as an affordable alternative to the F-22. Already, the F-35's sticker price has grown from \$65 million per plane, forecast about a decade ago, to \$158 million. The F-35 was also supposed to save money because it would be used by the Air Force, Navy, and Marines. However, the Marines wanted their F-35s capable of taking off and landing vertically, so that they can be resupplied on beachheads. Adding the necessary features made the fighter more complex and expensive—though the Air Force and Navy don't expect to use the F-35 as a "jump jet" and the Marines may not either, except at air shows.

There is a Joint Chiefs of Staff structure that, in theory, should resolve these sorts of squabbles. But the Joint Chiefs are like the board of directors at BP—they rubber-stamp whatever is put in front of them. Each member of the Joint Chiefs is a four-star officer in his final billet, soon to retire and accept a cushy job in private industry. The last thing he wants is to offend a powerful Pentagon interest group.

On Capitol Hill, lawmakers whose states or districts contain military installations or defense contractors have a gentlemen's agreement not to attack each other's pie slice: The contractors for

mega-projects like the F-35 carefully distribute construction throughout almost every state. The result of this unwritten congressional rule—I won't challenge your boondoggle if you won't challenge mine—is that spending for any one military or security category can rise only if *all* such expenditures rise.

DESPITE unprecedented spending, U.S. weapons are becoming antiquated. The Air Force consists mainly of aircraft designed 30 or more years ago. The Army's primary tank, the M-1, went into the field when Jimmy Carter was president. Billions of dollars have been wasted on replacement projects, including a super-costly plan for a swarm of elaborate armored vehicles called Future Combat Systems, but the initiatives failed to produce a substitute. Under current plans, the M-1 will remain the Pentagon's primary armor until 2050, when the tanks will be 70 years old.

All U.S. bombers are showing age—the final B-52 came off the assembly line the year the Beatles recorded their first single; the unreliable B-1 first took flight when Gerald Ford was president; and the B-2 was in the air before Web browsers existed. The Air Force hoped to field by 2018 a modern bomber engineered for miniature electronics and satellite-guided munitions, but Gates cancelled the project after the costs exceeded the giggle test. The current plan is to rely on the B-2 until at least 2040, when the planes will be 50

additional fighters. The Navy has eleven carrier strike groups—each a large nuclear aircraft carrier typically accompanied by guided-missile cruisers and destroyers, plus two nuclear submarines unseen beneath. These strike groups are so powerful that no other nation's warships could draw within firing distance before being sunk. No other nation will try, because while the United States has eleven nuclear supercarriers, the rest of the world has none.

For centuries, an essential theme of the struggle between great powers was the quest for naval supremacy. That contest has ended with a final score of 11-0, as other nations have ceased even attempting to counter U.S. maritime power. There hasn't been a significant naval engagement anywhere since 1982, during the Falklands War. Washington's naval dominance is good for everyone, as liberal international trade is made possible by the American insistence, dating back to Woodrow Wilson, that sea transit be safe and open to any nation. Still, the United States hardly needs eleven carrier strike groups to maintain its edge. Half as many would represent incontestable naval might. Despite this, the Navy wants to expand the U.S. fleet by another 50 ships in the next five years. After all, it gets roughly 30 percent of the military budget and has to spend the money on something.

In August, Gates proposed the elimination of the Joint Forces Command, based in Norfolk, Virginia. The Joint Forces

"Cancelled" Pentagon projects are more enduring than brooding teen vampires.

years old. And let's hope no B-2 gets shot down, because, at \$2 billion apiece, the bombers are so expensive that the Air Force has only 20. When the project was proposed during the Reagan administration, *The Washington Monthly* quipped that B-2s would be so few and expensive they would be named after states, like battleships. The B-2s are now named after states.

Paradoxically, though modernization is lagging, parts of the U.S. military and security systems are overbuilt. The Air Force is already stronger than all other air forces, with more advanced fighters and bombers than the rest of the world combined. Gates has estimated that, a decade from now, the United States will possess 20 times as many advanced fighter aircraft as China. Yet the Pentagon is seeking funding for thousands of

Command is one of the Pentagon's ten "unified combatant commands"—chances are we will be okay with nine. Opposition to Gates's plan was immediate and intense. Virginia's governor created a Monty Python-style Commission on Military and National Security Facilities, whose purpose is to demand that spending rise eternally. Like many parts of the Defense Department, the Joint Forces Command is a cookie jar for politicians. With no fiscal discipline observed in any other aspect of government, why should Virginia's special deal be disrupted?

Even the officer corps is overbuilt. Today, the United States has more four-star generals and admirals than during the Nixon administration, when there were twice as many active-duty enlisted personnel. This not only means expense but top-heavy chains of command in

which multiple layers of brass must sign off on trivia. The ranks of senior contractor personnel are swollen, too. When Gates recently proposed to eliminate 50 flag officer slots, and cut funding for 150 senior-executive contractor positions, there was consternation at the Armed Services Committees on the Hill, where stars and senior-grade jobs are prized political plums to be distributed.

TODAY, AMERICA'S armed forces are almost entirely expeditionary. The United States has about 400,000 active-duty personnel stationed overseas, including around 59,000 in Germany and 33,000 in Japan. Tremendous numbers of U.S. aircraft and tanks sit, with their spare parts and crews, on other continents, along with an entire carrier strike group "forward deployed" in Japan. The United States maintains 652 military bases and similar installations in other nations, plus an ever-changing number in Iraq and Afghanistan. Housing a large force structure on other continents is far more costly than maintaining one stateside. While the Base Realignment and Closure Commission has been engaged in a two-decade tooth-pulling exercise to shut down military installations within the United States, we've been opening new ones overseas.

With the cold war long over, why does America need a huge troop presence in Germany, which has been a liberal democracy for 50 years? Why do we still need a huge troop presence in Japan? Forces to counter North Korea are based in South Korea and Guam; if we really think China threatens Japan, then we shouldn't be cooperating so enthusiastically with China.

The mindset of top-heavy spending has also infiltrated the realm of counterterrorism and intelligence. For security advice, the president now has a secretary of defense, a secretary of state, a director of national intelligence, a national security adviser, a Central Intelligence Agency, a National Security Council, a President's Intelligence Advisory Board, a National Security Agency, a Defense Intelligence Agency, separate Air Force, Navy, Marine, Army, and even Coast Guard intelligence commands, a National Counterterrorism Center, an FBI Directorate of Intelligence, a State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, a National Reconnaissance Office, and a National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. Even the Treasury Department has an Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence.

The specter of terrorism obviously required an improvement in intelligence. But spending for the sake of spending

doesn't make the nation any safer, while multiple overlapping bureaucracies may only slow reaction time. The new security hierarchies are sagging under the weight of senior-grade officials who spend much of their time in turf battles. Recently, the director of national intelligence, Dennis Blair, resigned after just 16 months on the job, after a sandbox squabble with the CIA over whose name comes first on memos. If that's how people at the top of the security hierarchy are behaving, imagine how those in the middle are wasting the public's time.

Many of these multiple redundant agencies are in the process of building themselves palaces. The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, which takes extremely expensive aerial urban photographs, is raising a \$1.8 billion headquarters that will be the third-largest government building in the Washington area. Hiding behind classified status, it is effectively exempt from cost control or public scrutiny. The very day Gates announced an initiative to "reduce excess overhead costs," it quietly signed contracts to add billions of dollars to long-term defense overhead. The CIA, the National Reconnaissance Office, and the Geospatial-Intelligence Agency all have secret budgets. The budgets are secret because they are what the agencies care most about protecting.

WHY IS THE United States spending \$700 billion per year on defense at a time when great-power tensions are low, and no other nation is even attempting to challenge the Pentagon's supremacy? If U.S. defense and intelligence costs were pared in sensible ways, Washington would still retain a military dominance that no other nation would attempt to challenge.

Why does Washington assume that use of its fantastically capable military will always bring positive results? We keep sending our forces far away to insert themselves into other people's fights. Because we are the good guys, we can't face the reality that, most of the time, this doesn't work. This is no failing of U.S. forces; it is simply the limit of power. Some problems cannot be solved with soldiers and air crew, no matter how well-equipped and skilled they are. And when we choose to deploy forces, vast costs follow: increased military health care expenditures, the long-term financial burden of looking after injured veterans, and the construction and maintenance of expensive bases in war zones. Asking why we are doing this could lead to many constructive reforms.

Yet these questions go unasked, because they are in no one's interest in institutional Washington. Congress wants to spend money; the Defense Department and its sister organizations in intelligence want to command money; contractors want to receive money. Figuring out cost-effective alternatives is practically unpatriotic.

Institutional Washington tends to assume that exorbitant military spending is "just" waste, as if an enormous squandering of resources is annoying but has no other downside. Of course, no person would assume this about his or her own personal budget. Throughout the last decade, America has diverted a significant amount of its national wealth to defense and security. This year, the United States will spend about \$315 billion more on defense and security than it did ten years ago, which equates to about 2 percent of GDP. Subtract over \$300 billion annually from federal spending and the national debt becomes much less dire. And when Washington spends recklessly on overpriced weapons systems or unnecessary bureaucracy, the loss isn't limited to entries on a ledger. That's money that can't be invested in preserving the vitality of America that the military is meant to protect. ♦

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Israel and the United States

Is Israel an asset or a burden to our country?

The United States is without question Israel's most important ally. Also, without question, Israel is the staunchest and most reliable friend of the United States. But there are some who believe and vigorously advocate that Israel is a burden to the United States and that, were it not for Israel, peace would prevail in the Middle East.

What are the facts?

The "Israel lobby." There are indeed those who claim that Israel is a liability, a burden to our country. Professors from prestigious universities write essays in which they aver that the United States is in thrall to the "Israel lobby." This lobby is said to pull the strings of American policy. Its supposed main promoters are AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and the so-called "neo-cons," some of whom are indeed Jewish. They are said to exert an almost magical spell over policy makers, including the leaders of Congress and the President. Some even say that the Iraq war was promoted by this omnipotent "Israel lobby," that the President was flummoxed into declaring war on Saddam Hussein, not in order to defend the United States or to promote its interests, but in order to further the interests of Israel.

Israel is indeed a major recipient of U.S. aid. Israel receives yearly \$3.0 billion, all of it in military aid – nothing in economic aid. 75% of this military aid must be spent with U.S. military contractors, making Israel a very large customer of those companies.

America's staunchest ally. A good case can be made that aid to Israel, all of it military, should be part of the United States defense budget, rather than of the aid budget because Israel is, next only perhaps to Britain, by far the most important ally of the United States. Virtually without exception, Israel's government and its people agree with and support the foreign policy objectives of the United States. In the United Nations, Israel's votes coincide with those of the United States over 90% of the time. The Arabs and other Moslem countries, virtually all of them recipients of American largess, almost reflexively vote against the United States in most instances.

Israel is indeed America's unsinkable aircraft carrier in the Middle East and the indispensable defender of America's interests in that area of the world. The people of the United States, individually and through their Congressional representatives, overwhelmingly support Israel in its seemingly unending fight against Arab aggression and Muslim terror. But that support is not only based on the great strategic value that Israel represents to the United States. It is and always has been based on shared values of liberty, democracy, and human rights. America and Israel are aligned by their shared love of peace and democracy. Israel and the United States stand together in their fight against Islamo-fascist terrorism. These shared values, these common ideals, will bind Israel and the United States forever.

"Israel and the United States stand together in their fight against Islamo-fascist terrorism. These shared values will bind Israel and the United States forever."

Israel is the major strategic asset of the United States in an area of the world that is the cradle of Islamo-fascism, which is dominated by tyrants and permeated by religious obscurantism and shows almost total disregard for human rights. During the decades-long Cold War, Israel was America's indispensable rampart against the inroads of the Soviet Union. It is now the bulwark against the aggressive intentions of Iran. During Desert Storm, Israel provided invaluable intelligence, an umbrella of air cover for military cargo, and had personnel planted in the Iraqi deserts to pick up downed American pilots.

Gen. George Keagan, former head of U.S. Air Force Intelligence, stated publicly that "Israel is worth five CIAs," with regard to intelligence passed to our country. He also stated that the yearly \$3.0 billion that Israel received in military assistance was worth \$50 to \$60 billion in intelligence, R&D savings, and Soviet weapons systems captured and transferred to the Pentagon. In contrast to our commitments in Korea, Japan, Germany, and other parts, not a single American serviceperson needs to be stationed in Israel. Considering that the cost of one serviceperson per year – including backup and infrastructure – is estimated to be about \$200,000, and assuming a minimum contingent of 25,000 troops, the cost savings to the United States on that score alone is on the order of \$5 billion a year.

Israel effectively secures NATO's southeastern flank. Its superb harbor, its outstanding military installations, the air and sea lift capabilities, and the trained manpower to maintain sophisticated equipment are readily at hand in Israel. It is the only country that makes itself available to the United States in any contingency. Yes, Israel is not a burden, but a tremendous asset to the United States.

This message has been published and paid for by

FLAME

Facts and Logic About the Middle East
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Books & the Arts

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS AROUND THE WORLD

IT IS ALMOST as if designed. The last film of Claude Chabrol, who died in September, is such an apt example of his major gifts that it is almost as if he had planned a farewell. *Inspector Bellamy*, with a screenplay by Odile Barski and Chabrol, is another of his mysteries in which the director seems at least as interested in the characters as he is in the mystery.

Chabrol said he wanted to pay homage to Georges Simenon, whose hundred-plus novels about Inspector Maigret are only a segment of his breathtaking output. (I once spent an afternoon with Simenon, during which I asked him how long it took him to write a novel. Promptly he replied, "Eleven days.") A further impulse was the fact that Gérard Depardieu would be in the film—his first with Chabrol—and the director saw the present-day Depardieu as the epitome of the middle-aged Maigret: possibly a bit heavier, a bit slower, suggesting more understanding of criminals and greater hatred of crime. *Inspector Bellamy*, a being in itself, is also a salute to Simenon and Depardieu, and—though hardly foreseen—a farewell from Chabrol.

First, we hear whistling. Then we see a cemetery. After whistling past this graveyard, we focus on Bellamy and wife, a devoted couple, who are vacationing in a small town. A stranger keeps trying to meet Bellamy, who keeps avoiding him, but the man is so persistent that at last the police inspector meets him. This leads to a story involving insurance scams, marital mix-ups, death. Through it all Bellamy moves as if he had encountered this story before yet is intrigued by the new wrinkles and the specific people involved.

Further, the film develops a parallel structure. Bellamy becomes entangled

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**INSPECTOR
BELLAMY**
IFC FILMS

**NOTHING
PERSONAL**
OLIVE FILMS

**WHITE
MATERIAL**
IFC FILMS

in a somewhat symmetrical mystery. His half-brother turns up—a handsome, alcoholic, bright layabout whom Bellamy has often helped previously and who is back for more. The brother's presence leads to somewhat deeper self-knowledge for Bellamy.

The film is so clearly made to do no more than engage an intelligent viewer that we are glad it succeeded. Along the way, we can savor the clever

little inventions by Chabrol to move his story along. For just one instance, Bellamy arrives at a woman's house and sees a watering can lying on the terrace floor. This leads to a blunt discovery. The whole sequence takes perhaps five seconds, but we can see that Chabrol searched beforehand for a means of revealing the fact without cliché.

One benefit that a really big film star provides is the assurance of embrace before we even see his or her new film. Depardieu himself knows that he doesn't have to begin, as most actors must, by winning the audience: that was done long ago. He can just enter and get right down to business, without implicit or explicit fanfare. What a warm dividend this kind of encounter is on the time we have invested in Depardieu. And what a piece of good luck that he and Chabrol joined up just before it was too late.



NOTHING PERSONAL could not be more of a contrast to the Chabrol. It is a first film; it has a simple narrative with only two characters, though minor ones flit through occasionally; and we never learn their backgrounds or even their names. Finally, although every moment is realistic, the story is a fantasy—it couldn't happen. Except that we see it happening.

In a town on the west coast of Ireland a young woman leaves her apartment—her rooms are bare, her small effects for sale on the lawn—and starts off down the road with a backpack. We learn from one of the few things she says to anybody that she doesn't know or care where she is going. She tramps along for a few days, sleeping sometimes in a field within a tiny tent that she has. Once she even breaks into an empty house and uses it overnight. She scrounges for food as she can.

After a while she comes to an isolated house on the coast—the enchanting Connemara coast. She sits on a bench outside the door, and a man appears in the doorway, quiet, interested, obviously a man of some poise and distinction. He asks her name, and she tells him it's none of his business. (Throughout the film he calls her "you," and she never even asks his name.) He appreciates her aloofness almost humorously. He puts a plate of food next to her. He offers her work in his garden, which she accepts.

The expected does not happen between them, at least not as we might have imagined. They are two people, not two pawns in a formula.

She continues to work for him, but she sleeps in her tent outside. We learn somewhat more about him than about her because we move through his house, which is comfortably furnished and stocked with food and wine and music of various kinds. We do not learn who he is or how he can afford this house and his life there. He takes his

motorboat into a town for supplies once in a while, but we don't go with him.

One particularly stormy night he insists that she come inside, into a room of her own with a key. Yet in their extremely taciturn way—she obviously controlling a range of feelings, he watching her control them—they have meals together, dig peat together, listen to music together.

One day he looks through her things when she's outside, learns the address of her former home, and goes to visit her long-deserted rooms. The landlady there apparently thinks he wants to rent them, but he just walks around them, absorbing atmosphere. "You" has meanwhile looked through his clothes and found a few hints—of no consequence. Eventually they do bed together, but it is not the consummation of a roaring romance, just the next step along the way. Matters proceed enticingly to the ending of the film, which is more of an explanation—partial, anyway—than a surprise.

The writer and director of *Nothing Personal* was a Polish-born woman, Urszula Antoniak, who lives in Holland and has been working in Dutch television. Possibly because of production help in Ireland, she made most of her first feature there—in English. What she is chiefly interested in, it would seem, is the silence deep within a person and the struggle to guard and retain selfhood in a world that claws constantly at you, trying to make you join in. Her film, by its very existence, seems almost to be her own self-defense. How many of us, woman or man, can simply leave the clawing and move on until we reach an accommodating companion in a lovely refuge? This is not likely to happen, Antoniak seems to have said, and for that very reason she had to make her film.

She is wonderfully helped by one familiar actor and one newcomer. Stephen Rea, the Irish stalwart, gives maturity and patience to the man. A young Dutch actress, Lotte Verbeek, who has glorious red hair, also has sensitivity and smolder. These two actors have helped Antoniak to create a small, haunting poem.

LOGICALLY ENOUGH, the French director Claire Denis has frequently addressed the subject of black Africans. Though she was born in Paris, in 1948, she spent most of her early years in West Africa as the daughter of a French colonial official. After film education in Paris and apprenticeship to Jacques Rivette, whose intra-cinematic style has had little effect on her, she made her first feature, *Chocolat* (1988), largely an account of the experiences of a little white girl in Africa growing up emotionally close to

black people. Her last film, *35 Shots of Rum* (2008), was a variation on her biracial interests: it dealt with black Africans in Paris.

Now, with *White Material*, she shifts to a different perspective on racial complexities: this film is seen from a thoroughly white perspective. The setting is an unnamed African country. It hardly needs a name: almost every day the newspaper brings word of violence in some African country. In this place, rebels are fighting the government, and though we don't see a great deal of gore, there are the familiar drastic results. The black actor Isaach De Bankolé, often important in Denis's work, here plays a rebel leader who is wounded when we meet him and is simply recumbent in one house after another. A symbol, perhaps. The center of the story, written by Marie N'Diaye and Denis, is a woman named Maria Vial (played by Isabelle Huppert) who is trying to save her family's coffee plantation in the midst of wild turbulence. The crop is coming in just as the workers begin to flee, and she frantically tries to recruit help amid the turmoil.

Family crises involving her stepson and son, her father-in-law and husband,

thicken the troubles. But the supervening sense is that Maria is doing more than trying to save the crop and the money involved. She is trying to save (as she thinks) a beneficial order of things—at least in relationship to a cloudy future. The subject is hardly new, alas, and is far from finished, alas again. Two of the artists who have dealt with it are J.M. Coetzee and Doris Lessing—not imperialists but comprehenders. If, occasionally, through these writers and others, *White Material* seems a touch familiar, the director and the actress brusquely remind us that it is not familiar to Maria.

Denis's style is straightforward, practical. The editing in and out of time sequence can be a bit distracting, and the cinematography is plain, careful to keep as figuratively invisible as possible. Another comprehender herself, Denis has a sincerity that sustains everything. However, the film coalesces principally through the passion and courage in Huppert's performance as Maria. Often we feel that, through Huppert, Maria is trying to grasp and hold the entire globe, Africa and the whole world, to halt its turning from the orderly past to a chaotic future. ♦

William Deresiewicz PORTNOY AGONISTES

NEMESIS

By Philip Roth
(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,
280 pp., \$26)

I.
EVEN BEFORE it begins, Philip Roth's new novel tells us something interesting about his career. Longtime readers will be familiar with the shape the author's "Books By" list—the catalogue of previous work that precedes the title page—has taken on in recent years. Instead of the usual chronological enumeration, a set of categories: Zuckerman Books, Roth Books, Kepesh Books, Miscellany, and a bit forlornly, Other Books. The first three categories, of course, are named for their protagonists (or in the case of the later Zuckermans, their narrator); "Miscellany" refers to a pair of non-fiction collections. Nothing surprising so far, but now the new novel has given its name to a new category, indeed a new kind of category: "Nemeses," a rubric that includes, with the exception of

Exit Ghost, the last of the Zuckerman books, all of the short novels that Roth has been producing, one a year, since 2006—*Everyman*, *Indignation*, *The Humbling*, and *Nemesis* itself. With the new book, in other words, the recent chapter of Roth's career becomes aware of itself as a larger artistic idea—albeit one whose meaning is not immediately clear.

For if Roth's oeuvre can be organized by category, it can also be segmented, more usefully, by phase. There is the earnest-young-writer phase, which began with *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) and included his first two novels, *Letting Go* and *When She Was Good*. There is the shock-the-bourgeoisie phase, which began in jism-spraying fashion with *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) and included *The Breast*, *Our Gang* (a gleefully wicked political satire), and *The Professor of Desire*. There is the portrait-of-the-artist/metafiction phase—the Zuckerman and Roth books—which began with *The Ghost Writer* (1979). There is the great late-season run of historical fictions that began with *American Pastoral* in 1997—

Roth was already in his sixties—and included *The Human Stain* and *The Plot Against America*. Without multiplying the epicycles, it wouldn't do to be too strict about these demarcations. Roth's experiments in pseudo-autobiography began with *My Life As a Man*, during the Portnoy phase. *Sabbath's Theater* (1995), often thought of as his greatest work, falls between phases three and four. (It is also the odd man out among the official categories; without it, "Other Books" is essentially "Early Books," and *Sabbath* stands implacably alone.) But the larger shape still holds.

Now, after the crescendo of late major novels, and understandably given the author's age, an annual series of shorter works, the Nemesis plus *Exit Ghost*. A Zuckerman book the latter surely is—and brilliantly rounds out the cycle by channeling *The Ghost Writer* in cast and theme as well as title—but it also belongs among its age-mates. For what unites the novels of the current phase is not their length alone, but—and here we start to get an understanding of that odd new label, "Nemesis"—their common interest in dramatic form, specifically, in tragic form.

Everyman, the first of the series, is named for the medieval morality play. But while the original is a divine comedy—Everyman, summoned by Death, repents and goes to Heaven—Roth's retelling is a secular tragedy. His protagonist also faces death, also looks back on a life of error, also finds himself bereft before the grave. But here, instead of angels, there are only doctors; instead of salvation, only extinction. In *Exit Ghost*, the following year, the theatrical elements were even more pronounced. The title comes from *Hamlet*, and the novel likewise deals with haunting, and madness, and fathers, and incest, and bad dreams. It has five parts, like a Shakespeare drama, and a play-within-the-novel: a series of interpolated scenes—five, again, to be exact—that constitute a kind of counter-text, the protagonist's futile attempt, like Hamlet's *The Mousetrap*, to master and manage a messy reality by reducing it to dramatic form.

Next came *Indignation*, where tragic mood turns openly to tragic plot. The young protagonist, acting out the dictates of his character and blind to the circumstances that beset him—like Oedipus, like Achilles—unleashes his own downfall. At the end, the narrator laments the young man's fate in the manner of a Greek chorus: "Yes, if only this and if only that. . . . If only his father, if only Flusser, if only Elwyn, if only Caudwell, if only Olivia—!" Roth goes so far as to explicitly articulate

a moral to the story, but if the gesture comes from Aesop, its purport is Sophoclean: "the terrible, the incomprehensible way one's most banal, incidental, even comical choices achieve the most disproportionate result."

The Humbling, whose title might describe the tragic process itself, extends the exploration in a different way. Now the protagonist actually is an actor, one whose powers have deserted him during a performance of *Macbeth*. His agent wants him to get back in the game by accepting the role of James Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night*—that is, stop being a washed-up actor by playing one. Instead—this is chapter two—revival comes, as usual with Roth, through sex, this time in the form of an affair with the daughter of old theatrical friends, herself named after a dramatic character, Pegeen Mike from *The Playboy of the Western World*. But then, as in a modern play, comes the third act, chapter three—called, in fact, "The Last Act"—where the novel lurches back toward tragedy, and the protagonist writes his own ending ("finally it occurred to him to pretend that he was committing suicide in a play") in the style of *The Seagull*.

AND SO TO *Nemesis*, named for the very engine of Greek tragedy, the principle of cosmic retribution. Like *Indignation*, *Nemesis* takes place during the era of Roth's youth—the former in the early 1950s, the latter in the summer of 1944. Like *Indignation*, it begins in Roth's Combray, the old Jewish neighborhood of Weequahic in Newark. Like *Indignation*, it centers on a young protagonist—Marcus Messner in the earlier book, who journeys off to college in the heartland; Bucky Cantor in the new one, twenty-three years old during that fateful season of the war. And like *Indignation*, it is a kind of Attic tragedy in prose: hubris, hamartia, nemesis; spare plot, fallen hero, endless suffering.

Bucky—solid, orphaned, an athlete, dependable, but 4F on account of his eyesight—directs the playground at the local school, watching over the neighborhood boys throughout the broiling summer days. But then a more insidious danger strikes—an outbreak of polio that quickly flares into an epidemic and starts to claim his innocent charges. Bucky feels helpless, bereft, angry at God, but also torn: his girlfriend Marcia is working at a summer camp in the Poconos, and the camp director wants to bring him up to run the waterfront.

Should he stay or should he go? Who will protect the boys if he abandons

them?—a question made more urgent by his own history. His mother having died in childbirth, Bucky was left to be raised by his grandparents after his feckless father skipped town. Still, how much good is he doing in Newark anyway? Is it even healthy for the boys to play together anymore? And doesn't he also have a right to be happy and safe? But his friends are invading France, and Bucky knows where duty lies. His boys need him; his community needs him. His father was a crook, but his grandfather taught him what it means to be a man. And yet, one evening on the phone with Marcia, he suddenly betrays himself—the moment of hamartia, the tragic mistake (not, as it is often misinterpreted, tragic flaw). Yes, he blurts out, he'll come up after all.

But as for Oedipus, there's no running away. Bucky makes a break for mountain air and maidenly love, but guilt follows him, turning the sweetness to ashes—and before long, polio follows him, too. Which is to say, nemesis does. His downfall is stunningly swift and complete. In body and spirit, the summer leaves him permanently broken. The novel's final section flashes forward twenty-seven years. The narrator, who was one of the boys who had contracted the disease (and who, as Roth's coeval, functions as the author's surrogate), runs into his old mentor on the Newark streets. The narrator has lived a normal life despite his disability, but Bucky, out of remorse and self-loathing, has refused to move on from those distant events, and his existence is a desert.

Roth multiplies the classical overtones. Bucky's athletic specialty is the javelin, and the novel ends with a beautifully lyrical retrospect that, evoking the hero's youthful body in all its perfection and power, might have been lifted from a vase. ("The first javelin thrower was said to be Hercules," Bucky tells the boys.) As for the epidemic itself, it is nothing other than the kind of plague that incites the action of the *Iliad*. Bucky recollects the Indian lore, picked up at the summer camp, that diseases are caused by invisible arrows—exactly what Homer's warriors, invoking Apollo, likewise believed.

But most important is the way the hero rages at the gods—or, this being 1971, at God. His final exchange with the narrator functions, rather didactically, like the moral at the end of *Indignation* or the epilogue to the medieval *Everyman*, announcing what we ought to think about the action. Bucky blames both God and himself—the two together, somehow, at the same time, "mystically, mysteriously," as the narrator puts it, "in

their dreadful joining together as the sole destroyer.” For the narrator, the problem is that Bucky blames anyone at all:

That the polio epidemic . . . was a tragedy, he could not accept. He has to convert tragedy into guilt. . . . He has to ask why. Why? Why? That it is pointless, contingent, preposterous, and tragic will not satisfy him. That it is a proliferating virus will not satisfy him. Instead he looks desperately for a deeper cause, this martyr, this maniac of the why.

It is, the narrator concludes, “nothing more than stupid hubris, not the hubris of will or desire but the hubris of fantastical, childish religious interpretation.”

Bucky’s tragedy, in other words, is that he misunderstands the nature of trag-

edy. He substitutes a Jewish or Judeo-Christian metaphysics not for a pagan one (since Oedipus also felt guilt, and the Greeks certainly asked why) but for a modern mechanistic, atheistic one. There is no why, the narrator implies; all there is is is. Bucky’s real hamartia is the delusion that he belongs to a morally coherent universe, a world of good and evil and guilt and punishment. Something went wrong, so someone must be to blame, and that someone is him.

“The Last Act”: the title of *The Humbling*’s final chapter takes advantage of a long-familiar pun in dramatic literature. Acting is about acting. The tragic stage has always been a laboratory for the examination of action in all of its dimensions: motive, intention, choice, consequence. But theater by its nature tends to turn the equation around. When we

act, are we really only putting on an act? That’s what Roth’s tragedian seems to think. At the very least, before he takes the ultimate action (“finally it occurred to him to pretend that he was committing suicide in a play”), he has to make believe that he is acting. The question arises—for Bucky as well—as to whether, when we act, we must necessarily imagine an audience, even if only an audience of the self. When the protagonist of *Indignation* takes his fatal step—“bang[ing] down his fist on the dean’s desk and tell[ing] him for a second time, ‘Fuck you,’” a gesture that propels him from his bovine college to the abattoir of Korea—he seems to be playing a role that he has written for his own admiration.

IN *NEMESIS*, the name of the protagonist is Cantor. In *The Humbling*, it is Axler. In *Indignation*, it is Messner. That latter work, of all of Roth’s recent novels the one most explicitly concerned with the question of action, also gives us, among the young man’s fellow students, a Flusser, a Cottler, a Ziegler, and a Spector. This is surely no coincidence. All of these are, or at least sound like, the names of agents, doers of action. But most are also something more specific: the names of occupations. Messner is a sexton; Cottler is a kettle-maker; Spector is a teacher’s assistant; Ziegler is a bricklayer. Cantor, of course, is a cantor.

Not just occupations, then, but occupations either working-class or Jewish. Occupations, in other words, that evoke the world of Newark’s Jewish fathers as Roth has built it up across his oeuvre, but especially in the nostalgic works of recent years, the historical novels as well as the Nemeses—a world of shopkeepers, frugality, long hours, continence, a world of sacrifice. In *Everyman*, the protagonist’s father was a jeweler. Marcus Messner’s father is a butcher. Bucky Cantor’s grandfather, the man who raised him, ran a grocery store.

And here we come to the crux of the matter in *Nemesis*. “The first javelin thrower was said to be Hercules”: Bucky wants to be a hero, and he wants to be a hero in exactly the way that his immigrant grandfather was. Not by doing spectacular deeds, but by behaving steadily and dependably and resolutely—exactly as he was taught to do:

The grandfather saw to the boy’s masculine development, always on the alert to eradicate any weakness that might have been bequeathed—along with the poor eyesight—by his natural father and to teach the boy that a man’s

From “Nocturnes”

Beautiful moon the murderer begins to sing
The thief takes off his mask to smell the heliotrope

A junkie steals asters from a rich man’s grave
And spreads them on the modest mound of his mother

A lone girl walks with moonlit haste in the shadow of
the maquiladoras

*

Pol Pot sleeps counting heaven’s lambs
His ex-wife is learning ikebana

*

A pretty boy dances naked in a cage
Twelve or thirteen he is brown and slender
He sings *My father sold me to the hillside wolves*
For a snort of the white dragon

*

The sky does not judge it’s black and starless
The geese squawking high must make their destination

*

The corpse of my love reappears in a dream
The corpse of my love unzips his own body bag

*

The monkey claps and claps his cymbals are tired
Prosperity decline what does it matter?

*

“A Death blow is a Life blow to Some”
Tell them Emily those woolly ministers

Chopin’s fingers play soft soft soft
Comforting the beasts and flowers

MARILYN CHIN

every endeavor was imbued with responsibility.

And at the tender age of ten, young Eugene (for that is Bucky's given name) lived up to his grandfather's teachings. Helping out one evening in the grocery store, he spied a rat in the storeroom. Instead of running, he grabbed a shovel:

Holding his breath, he advanced on tiptoe until he had stalked the panicked rat into a corner. When the boy lifted the shovel into the air, the rat rose on its hind legs and gnashed its frightening teeth, deploying itself to spring. But before it could leave the floor, he brought the underside of the shovel swiftly downward and, catching the rodent squarely on the skull, smashed its head open.

"It was following this triumph," the narrator tells us, "that his grandfather—because of the nickname's connotation of obstinacy and gutsy, spirited, strong-willed fortitude—took to calling the bespectacled ten-year-old Bucky."

It is Homer in Newark again. The story of the rat is a working-class version of the celebrated story of Odysseus's scar. The rat takes the place of the boar, the shovel of the spear (though later, of course, Bucky *will* carry a spear). In *The Odyssey*, the presiding patriarch is also the hero's maternal grandfather, Autolycus, who also gifts him with a name. Even Roth's description is Homeric: "Blood intermingled with bits of bone and brain drained into the cracks of the stockroom floorboards." But as in Homer, coming of age is only the beginning.

Bucky's grandfather is gone by the summer of 1944, but the novel plants paternal figures all around its hero. There is his girlfriend's father, Dr. Steinberg, "a man of natural, unadorned authority." There is the camp director, Mr. Blomback, who likes to say that "manhood is the first aim of education." There is the camp's own doctor, "a middle-aged man with an unruffled manner." Having lost his father before he even knew him, Bucky can't get enough of these replacements. But now it is time to be a man himself. Early in the epidemic, he single-handedly faces down a pack of Italian teenagers from the other side of town who have shown up at the playground to cause trouble—an episode that does indeed make him a hero, as well as something of a father figure, "an idolized, protective heroic older brother, particularly to those whose own older brothers were off in the war."

The war, of course, is a large part of the point. Because of those eyes he inherited from his worthless father, a kind of congenital taint, Bucky's missed his chance to be a real hero. The shame of walking around safe at home during the summer of D-Day is never remote from the young man's mind. The polio, then, is the war brought home ("his war," Bucky calls it)—among other reasons, because it raises the same agonizing theological questions. In the middle of it all, Bucky learns that one of his closest friends has died in France. How could God have let it happen, any more than he was letting children die in Newark?

Of course, in 1944, God was letting something else happen, a fact the novel hints at all too clearly. Bucky's grandfather had taught him to stand up for himself, not only as a man but also as a Jew. Bucky seeks to pass the lesson on, teaching his boys "to be physically brave and physically fit and never to allow themselves to be pushed around or . . . defamed as Jewish weaklings and sissies." "I'm against the frightening of Jews," says steady Dr. Steinberg when everyone in Weequahic is panicking about the outbreak. "That was Europe."

The stakes for Bucky could hardly be higher: live down his father; live up to his grandfather; make his new paternal figures proud; protect his boys; erase the stigma of the noncombatant; stand up for Jewish manhood. It's no surprise he runs away, and also no surprise that he can never forgive himself. "There's nobody less salvageable than a ruined good boy," the narrator concludes:

The guilt in someone like Bucky may seem absurd but, in fact, is unavoidable. Such a person is condemned. Nothing he does matches the ideal in him. He never knows where his responsibility ends. He never trusts his limits because . . . he will never guiltlessly acknowledge that he has any limits.

The refusal to acknowledge limits: this, in the classical conception, is the very definition of hubris. Bucky's moral extremism, far more than his theology, is the source of his downfall. His standards are simply too high. If he can't live up to them, he won't allow himself to live at all.

II.

NOW THE DRAMA of the good boy is not exactly what we think of when we think of Philip Roth. Roth made his reputation not only writing about bad boys, but in so doing, becoming one himself. Paternal strictures;

immigrant restraint; Jewish respectability and moral seriousness; the saintly victimhood, as he perceived it, of Malamud and other literary father figures: it was in the face of all of these that Roth rang up his Jolly Roger. Just on the basis of *Goodbye, Columbus*, he was already a black sheep in the Jewish community, the kid who washed the dirty underwear in public. With *Portnoy*—the ultimate literary *shande*—he made himself into an outright renegade. Chaucer called Ovid Venus's clerk; Roth was something more like penis's clerk. "LET'S PUT THE ID BACK IN YID," Portnoy sloganizes. To Isaac Babel's characterization of the Jewish writer as "a man with autumn in his heart and spectacles on his nose," the young Nathan Zuckerman adds, "and blood in his penis." The soiled handkerchief that Alvin Pepler leaves for the protagonist in *Zuckerman Unbound* could stand as their creator's calling card.

But now, in most of the Nemeses as well as *The Plot Against America*, the novel that preceded them, Roth has turned to filial piety, on both his own part and his protagonists'. Portnoy's father is a figure of fun, the terminally constipated working stiff. But in the recent fiction Weequahic's fathers (and mothers) are pillars of rectitude and strength, the rock on which the world stands firm—not the adolescent's parents but the child's. There may indeed be something of nostalgia here, and something also of an aging man's inevitable shift in values. The heroically prolific Roth has famously become a model of monastic diligence himself, putting in the long hours, up there in his writing studio in rural Connecticut, as steadily, as laboriously, and as productively as any immigrant shopkeeper.

Yet something further also appears to be at work. For all their strenuous fucking, Roth's priapic protagonists never seem to manage to convince themselves that they are really men. It isn't just that Zuckerman, following his prostate surgery some

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volumes ago, is impotent, though the situation is certainly emblematic. It's that the very notion of sexual conquest as a way of proving one's virility turns out to be inadequate. The Weequahic strivers, they were men. Bucky's grandfather "had come alone to America in the 1880s as an immigrant child from a Jewish village in Polish Galicia. His fearlessness had been learned in the Newark streets, where his nose had been broken more than once in fights with anti-Semitic gangs." And the older brothers, the ones who fought in World War II—as Roth, b. 1933, could not—they were men, too. But Roth's generation, coming of age in a safe and a prosperous world, all the postwar generations, what options have they had for winning their masculinity? Nothing but sex, combat with girls. And that, after all, is only kid stuff.

FOR MARCUS MESSNER and Bucky Cantor, though, the brace of recent young protagonists, a different tack. From id we turn to superego. While Marcus has a memorable blowjob, the sex in both novels is studiously secondary; each young man is tightly wrapped and stays that way. "That tyrant, my superego," Portnoy says, "he should be strung up, that son of a bitch." But Bucky is all superego, and Marcus does him one better: he rebels *in the name of* the superego. A paragon of discipline and duty, the perfect polite Jewish brainy boy, he runs away from home because his father will not acknowledge just how stainlessly obedient he is. At college in Ohio, while the rest of the campus erupts in an epic panty raid, he gets himself expelled on a point of principle, nailing Bertrand Russell to the mast as he goes down for his ideals.

The generational inferiority complex of Roth's cohort manifests itself in both works. Bucky's draft status renders him equivalent to the little boys he supervises. Marcus ends up dying in Korea, the younger brothers' war. The latter circumstance bespeaks a deeper point. However Roth may venerate his parents' generation, he is not suggesting that anybody emulate them. To do so would be to try to live an anachronism. Marcus, we're told, is the only one of his classmates to be killed in the Korean war. The same offensive regulations that he martyrs himself in defiance of, others mock and learn to circumvent. One of his roommates, Bertram Flusser (whose very name is lax and louché), is the college's "abominable bohemian," outlandish and contemptuous and gay, but the conservative administration never lays a finger on him. Taking revenge for a minor slight while the pro-

tagonist is absent in the hospital, Flusser systematically masturbates all over Marcus's clothes—Portnoy *avant la lettre*.

Flusser is the future, c. 1951, and it is no coincidence that he is also an actor. In the postwar world, the fixed identities of immigrant Weequahic are history. *The Humbling*, that actor's novel, is about "transformation," the title of its second part. Axler, of course, has his roles. His lover, Pegeen Mike, whose very name suggests sexual fluidity, is an ex-lesbian (and present bisexual) whose former lover underwent a sex change and whom the protagonist makes over like a latter-day Eliza Doolittle. Zuckerman's whole career—and through him and others, Roth's—has been a process of successive metamorphoses. Ovid is right: the transformative power of eros and art.

Axler and Zuckerman are old; the one dies and the other exits because they lose the strength to start again and so run out of ways to change. But Marcus and Bucky belong to Euripides; like Pen-theus in *The Bacchae*, they refuse to release their rigid self-conceptions and so, like him, are torn apart. Marcus is dismembered on the battlefield. Bucky's frame is wrenched by polio, and his spirit is emasculated. "Bucky considered himself a gender blank—as in a cartridge that is blank," "no longer man enough to be a husband and a father." His is not a literal death, but it is a living death. Like Marcus, he could have saved himself if only he, like Roth or Zuckerman, had had a sense of irony, the double vision that enables you to step outside yourself and play a role, or recognize that that's already what you're doing—if he were not so insistent, in other words, on the importance of being earnest. "He was largely a humorless person," the narrator says, "articulate enough but with barely a trace of wit, who never in his life had spoken satirically or with irony, who rarely cracked a joke or spoke in jest—someone instead haunted by an exacerbated sense of duty." Bucky, like Marcus, gets stuck in the past, a living fossil of 1944. Portnoy's way is the right one after all, given what the world is now.

IN FACT, in a curious and clearly deliberate fashion, the spirit of *Portnoy* hovers over both these young-man books. The new novels reorchestrate scenes from their predecessor, but in a much more innocent or sober mood. Marcus's *shiksa* girlfriend stuns him with a first-night blowjob much the way The Monkey does to Portnoy. But the latter's smirking connoisseurship—"This stranger then proceeded to suck me off

with a mouth that might have gone to a special college to learn all the wonderful things it knew"—is tempered down to Marcus's artless "How did she know what to do or how to do it?" *Portnoy* wrings high comedy from Alex's mother's suspicions about her son's extracurricular eating habits: "You go to Harold's Hot Dog and *Chazerai* Palace after school and you eat French fries with Melvin Weiner. Don't you?" *Nemesis* rewrites this as the lamentation of a dead boy's aunt, on the way to his burial, and there's nothing funny about it:

Everyone in the car had been silent until they nearly reached the crest of the hill and were passing Syd's hot dog joint.

"Why did he have to eat in that filthy hole?" Mrs. Beckerman said. . . . "He wanted to be another Louis Pasteur . . . Instead . . . he had to go to eat in a place crawling with germs."

The echoes create the sense, especially in *Nemesis*, of a depthless kind of naïveté—a more intelligent and literary version of the effect connived at by the '50s-nostalgia genre in the popular culture of the 1970s (*Grease*, *Happy Days*). We read about 1944 or 1951, but with a thundering sense of everything that's soon to come—which is to say, of everything that's missing. Bucky's relationship with his girlfriend, Marcia—Marcia!—has an Archie-at-the-malt-shop innocence. ("Necking" enters into it a lot.) At camp, when a counselor tells the protagonist about his trouble mastering the intricacies of competitive diving, the dialogue modulates to the key of gee-whiz:

"Maybe I can help," Bucky said.

"Would you?"

"If there's time, sure."

"Oh, that's great. Thanks."

"We'll take them one by one. All you probably need are a few faults corrected and you'll be fine."

"And I'm not hogging your time?"

"Nope. If and when I have the time, it's yours."

"Thanks again, Mr. Cantor."

Of course, "necking" is exactly what they did back then. But the effect of the antiquarian perspective is to flatten the characters into virtual stereotypes. People in the '40s may have been more innocent in certain ways—or at least some people, in some places—but they were not simplistic. Marcia the perfect girlfriend; her adoring younger sisters; her wise and patient father-knows-best; even Bucky the Boy Scout himself, notwithstanding

his ethical struggles: all of them are one-dimensional, what-you-see-is-what-you-get kinds of figures, lacking the internal tension of substantially realized fictional characters. With its schematically tragic shape and concluding narratorial pronouncements, the whole thing feels too easy, a demonstration rather than a story.

The language, too, is largely flat, as well as oddly impersonal: "Mr. Cantor had been twenty and a college junior when the U.S. Pacific Fleet was bombed and nearly destroyed in the surprise Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941." Is Roth writing for the twenty-fifth century? Why not simply, "Mr. Cantor had been twenty and a college junior during Pearl Harbor"? There's that distance again, but also, a sense that Roth is disengaged from his material. The same was true of *Indignation*, though the problem here is worse. The writing is sapless, lurching, stiff. Here are the girls at Bucky's playground: "Leaping and darting about with excitement—except where Myron Kopferman and his like would apishly interfere—they exhibited astounding energy." And here's the head of that Italian gang: "The brazen ease of his thumbs tucked into the front two loops of his trousers served no less than his gaze to register his contempt." In freshman composition class, the term of art for this is "awk."

Roth's protagonists have almost always been around his age, and the gap between his present consciousness and

those of Marcus and Bucky may have simply been too great for him to bridge. But the main problem, I think, lies precisely in the kinds of people that those young men are. Roth's prose, that magnificent voice of his, has always fed off the twin passions of lust and rage; Marcus and Bucky's personalities revolve around the need to keep those emotions suppressed. *Indignation* only hits its stride when Marcus's girlfriend comes to his hospital room for pillow talk and surreptitious sex play. In *Nemesis*, the language sits up only at the end, when some real anger is finally expressed. If Roth created the effect deliberately—devised an angular, earnest, humorless style to mimic his protagonists' internal states—the choice was poorly conceived, another demonstration of the fallacy of imitative form.

The other possibility, of course, is senescence. *Everyman*, *Exit Ghost*, *The Humbling*: when Roth is not imagining the tragedies of callow young men in the distant past, he chronicles the failing powers of old men in the here and now—the "pointless, contingent, preposterous, and tragic" ending that awaits us all. "He'd lost his magic," *The Humbling* begins. "The impulse was spent." The self-referential implications of that slender work, a portrait of the artist in decline, are everywhere apparent. And yet its author has been counted out before, only to rally again. Word is that *Nemesis* completes the sequence of short novels. Its hero may not have the will to reinvent himself, but its creator surely does. ♦

rickets, your body has grown deformed and asthmatic, and you become a hunchback jeered at by people in the street. You despair of ever being loved by a woman.

Under the current law, you need a passport to leave your town. You write secretly to a friend of the family to obtain one, but the friend deliberately sends the passport to your father instead of to you. Your father leaves it for you, openly, knowing that you will feel unable to use it, and he is right. You say of your father, "I know for certain that he has declared that we shan't leave here while he is alive." Made guilty by your parents' "prayers and grief," you abandon your plan. Until you are twenty, you are not permitted out of your father's house unaccompanied.

By the time you reach your majority, you have been driven to a savage melancholy. Convinced by your reading of Latin and Greek authors that Christianity represents a huge error in the evolution of thought, you see the doctrines of Catholicism as vulgar superstition, and find disgusting the domination of Italy by Rome and its clerics. You are alienated entirely from the beliefs, religious and reactionary, of your family. As time goes on, they decide that since you are immersed in the books of your father's library, and clearly will not marry or have children, you should become a priest: what else is there for you to do? (You write to a friend, with fine irony, "God preserve me from the clerical habit with which they would muzzle me.") You repudiate their solicitations, and later you reject a clerical sinecure that they have procured. (Your brother takes it.) You despair of finding paid work that will enable you to escape; in your stratified culture, there are only peasants doing menial work, landed nobles who do not work, and the clerical establishment, in which you refuse to work. Your parents will not fund your living elsewhere; they see no reason why you should not stay home.

AND THAT—imprisonment in a family hell in a wretched backwater—is the opening of the life of Giacomo Leopardi, who in his short unhappy span rose to become the most famous poet in Italy in the nineteenth century. Although he wrote prose with phenomenal speed, compiling—in fifteen years—a 4,526-page *Zibaldone*, or "grab bag," filled with intellectual ruminations, philosophical epigrams, *pensées*, and sarcastic remarks on modern society, and although he became famous for a series of imaginary prose dialogues, often sardonic, collected as his *Operette Morali*, Leopardi's most lasting imprint on liter-

Helen Vendler

THE WORN-OUT HEART

CANTI

By Giacomo Leopardi

Translated and annotated

by Jonathan Galassi

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux,

498 pp., \$35)

IMAGINE YOURSELF a genius trapped in a small Italian town under the thumb of two dictatorial parents: a mother who is such a fanatical Catholic that she thinks the best fate for a child is an early death, so that he can go to heaven with the fewest possible sins; and a father who is a political reactionary and who has ruined the family fortune, so that although the family has land, there is no cash (or at least none that the mother, bent on restoring

the lost wealth, will disburse). Imagine yourself tutored by priests until your own learning, by the time you are twelve, has surpassed that of any local tutor: eaten up by intellectual curiosity, you begin ingesting and translating the classical Latin authors found in your father's library, staying up through the night reading and writing by the light of a single candle, and teaching yourself Greek, Hebrew, English, French, and Spanish, until you damage your eyesight. As you come to realize that nobody else in the town reads or talks about books, or has intellectual pursuits, you chafe more and more at your surroundings, and long to go somewhere—anywhere—away from this backward town. Also you are riven by personal sorrow: from scoliosis and

ature was made by his poetry, begun at the age of eighteen. It is a body of work charged on the one hand with a helpless longing, both sexual and philosophical, and on the other hand by a bitterness that was both personal and political. At twenty-one he abandoned for good his familial Catholicism. His growing incredulity that anyone could take seriously the notion of a supernatural realm and supernatural causes, his conviction that the classical world was radically superior—in its rationality, its materialism, its ethics, and its myths—to the Judeo-Christian one, and his vast learning, philological, philosophical, and literary, in ancient and modern languages, made him a lonely figure of intellectual passion, shy and sensitive in person but uncompromising in conviction and written expression.

At twenty-four, he got away temporarily to Rome; at twenty-seven, he visited Bologna and Milan, where he published his first *Idylls*, while also editing Cicero and writing a commentary on Petrarch's lyrics; at twenty-nine, he lived in Florence and then in Pisa. But he disliked society and its small talk, and was happy solely with fellow intellectuals, particularly those who could see beyond his invalid and disfigured body to his extraordinary spirit. (One such friend, Antonio Ranieri, a decade younger than Leopardi, took care of him in Rome and Naples for the last seven years of his brief life.) At thirty-two, supported in part by admirers of his work, and in part by a stingy stipend wrested from the family, Leopardi could at last leave his father's house. He fell unwisely in love with a Florence *salonnière*, but hoped in vain; she tired of him and his conversation. When he was thirty-seven, his *Works* (supported by seven hundred subscribers) appeared in two volumes: the first contained his *Canti*, the lyrics newly translated by Jonathan Galassi, the second a selection of his *Operette Morali*. He died in 1837, at the age of thirty-eight.

AS WE LOOK DOWN the table of contents of the *Canti*, we find poems that Galassi, in his sympathetic introduction, nicely groups under different modes: "the lyric and the didactic, the pastoral and the historic, the metaphoric and the argumentative." He rightly says that they "express the same spirit in diverse ways," and it was in that spirit that Italy found its modern lyric voice. Departing from the religious orientation of Dante, and from the erotic orientation of Petrarch's sonnets, Leopardi dedicated himself to the material uni-

verse as described by empirical science: a universe indifferent to mankind, obedient not to Providence but to its own physical laws. With great bravery, he flung his atheistic convictions at his society.

It must be remembered that during Leopardi's lifetime he had reason for pessimism, besides his personal suffering. Italy was occupied by the Austrians before it could carry out the revolutionary hopes that eventually brought about the Risorgimento. Although the poet took no stock in utopian prophecy, believing that there was no optimism possible with respect to the meaning and the destiny of individual life, he did long to see Italy freed from foreign rule. In his first youth this wish took the form of highly rhetorical poetry ("To Italy" and "On the Monument to Dante") abounding in successive questions and exclamations. Addressing Dante, he cries:

Glorious spirit,
tell me: has your love for your Italy
died?
Has the fire that gave you life gone
cold?
Will the myrtle that assuaged our
sadness for so long
never turn green again?
Have all our crowns been scattered
on the ground?
Will she never rise again
to resemble you in any way?

Did we die for all eternity?
Will our shame never end?

Effusions of this generalized sort become infrequent as Leopardi matures. Later, when he adopts a tragic style, Leopardi compresses his syntax into stabbing brevity. The suicidal assessment "*A Se Stesso*," or "To Himself," baldly, in a passage of seven lines, presents truncated sentences consisting of one word ("*Peri*"), two words ("*Assai palpitasti*"), and three words ("*Posa per sempre*"). English cannot be quite so concise, but Galassi does what English can:

Now you'll rest forever,
worn-out heart. The ultimate illusion
that I thought was eternal died. It died.
I know not just the hope but the desire
for loved illusions is done for us.
Be still forever.
You have beaten enough.

This poem confesses the end of illusion, particularly the illusion of love. As Leopardi finely distinguishes between his genuine youthful hope for love (which turned out to be false), and his subse-

quent and shaming desire to be again deceived (but this time recognizing hope as deception), he reiterates the emotional antithesis between desire and realism analyzed and deplored throughout his poetry.

The naïveté of the poet's youthful idealism was at first shocked into anger when he became conscious of the preposterous religious fictions (as he perceived them) in which he had been raised. He began his lifelong attempt to adjust his philosophical ideals to the stern materialism he had adopted from classical authors, Latin and Greek, and which he had then ratified in his own mind. He originally believed that in order to accomplish this attempt he had to reject idealistic language—to abjure the style of what he judged a delusive and uncorrected idealism. Then, after that energetic repudiation of both Christianity and false idealism, he arrived at a third phase, in which he struggled to reinstate, in the context of an Enlightenment materialism, the emotional values that were to be discovered in past idealism, which, he concluded, were indispensable to life, even if they could no longer exist in their formerly religious incarnation.

Thus the sweetness of youthful sexual attraction is allowed to produce passages of pure romance even in poems with tragic conclusions. In "To Silvia," we see the young poet leaning from a balcony in his father's house, watching, enraptured, a girl who is spinning. We learn at the end that she has died in her youth, but Leopardi has exposed a portion of time unmarred by despair:

I looked out on the cloudless sky,
the golden streets and gardens,
and, far off, the sea here and mountains
there.
No mortal tongue can tell
all that I felt.

As we read, we recall, from later poems, the dark moments in which "lovely youth" barely survives in a single phrase. Shortly before he died, the poet wrote "*Il tramonto della luna*," or "The Setting of the Moon," in which he reiterates the Catullan distinction between nature's self-regeneration and our permanent eclipse:

But mortal life, once lovely youth
has gone, is never dyed
by other light or other dawns again.
She remains a widow all the way.
And the Gods determined that the
night
which hides our other times ends in
the grave.

IS LEOPARDI'S POETRY translatable? A case of the translator's difficulty may be seen in the poem just quoted. Galassi has, in his favor, a contemporary plainness. But his version also baffles the reader, who wonders who is this "she" who remains a widow. The referent is clear in the Italian—"la vita mortal"—because "vita" is a female noun. But in English "life" is not female (or male); it is an abstract concept existing in a language that does not confer gender on its common nouns. Arturo Vivante's translation, which appeared in 1998, uses "it" instead of "she":

But mortal life...
never colors itself
of other light, or other dawn.
Widow it is to the end.

Galassi's version has sacrificed the reflexive verb of the original (which Vivante retains), using a passive instead: "life.../is never dyed/by other light or other dawns." Vivante, wanting to keep life's verb active, becomes entirely idiomatic: we do not say in English that "life/never colors itself/of other light." So readers, looking from version to version, may be inclined to agree with Leopardi himself, who remarked that "a poet, even a great one, would not be much acclaimed, and even if he were to become famous in his own country, would scarcely be known to the rest of Europe, because perfect poetry cannot be translated into foreign languages."

What, then, do we have a right to expect from Galassi? We must welcome a translation of a great European poet into contemporary American English, since every generation has to cast off the antiquated diction of its forebears. We can no longer feel close to the version of R. C. Trevelyan, from 1941, that offers us the following address to the moon:

What dost thou, Moon?
What dost thou in the sky?
Tell me, thou silent Moon.
Rising at eve, thou goest
Contemplating the deserts, and then
settest.
Hast thou not yet grown weary
Of travelling still the same eternal
ways?
Does it not irk thee yet?

Galassi's version is more natural to us:

What are you doing, moon,
up in the sky;
what are you doing, tell me, silent
moon?

You rise at night and go,
observing the deserts. Then you set.
Aren't you tired
of plying the eternal byways?
Aren't you bored?

But this readable passage lacks, as it must, both the rhyme of the original and the rhythmic impulses governing the scene. "You rise" is the literal meaning of the third-line Italian, but it does not do what the Italian does. Leopardi describes the action of the moon with a strong first syllable: "*Sorgi*" (imitated by Trevelyan in his "Rising"). With "*Sorgi*," the moon rises up on the page. We are bound to feel deprived, knowing that so many such effects (as Galassi himself declares in his introduction) are irremediably lost.

SINCE SO MANY of Leopardi's poems are paralleled in his prose, the reader is grateful for Galassi's hundred pages of generous and helpful notes, which do not merely clarify allusions, explain myths, identify landscapes, and so on, but also reproduce (as do Italian critical editions of the poet) comparable passages extracted from the copious prose. The prose exposition is usually more straightforward, the poems more intense. Here is a sample comparison. This is the prose, from Leopardi's *Pensieri*, in which life is seen as an arduous journey made by a handicapped traveler who comes to a tragic end:

Life? It's the journey of a sick and crippled man who carries a tremendous burden on his back and works his way up and down mountains, through dangerous and difficult places, through snow and sleet and rain and wind and unbearable heat, on and on, never once resting, until at last after many long days he comes to the edge of an abyss or a deep ditch and falls headlong into it.

And here is the corresponding passage in "Night Song of a Wandering Shepherd in Asia," exemplifying the characteristic Leopardian unbroken syntactic cascade, dealt out by the wandering shepherd in sixteen continuous lines:

Little old white-haired man,
weak, half naked, barefoot,
with an enormous burden on his back,
up mountain and down valley,
over sharp rocks, across deep sands
and bracken,
through wind and storm,
in hot and freezing weather,
runs on, running till he's out of breath,

crosses rivers, wades through swamps,
falls and climbs and rushes on
ever faster, no rest or relief,
battered, bloodied; till at last he comes
to where his way
and all his effort led him:
terrible, immense abyss
into which he falls, forgetting
everything.
This, O virgin moon,
is human life.

"Life," which the prose puts first, is withheld in the poem till the end. Both the old man and the landscape are far more distinctly specified; and while the prose ends with physical fact, as the old man falls into the pit, the poem, focused inward, ends with his loss of consciousness. Most telling of all, in the prose the old man is not wounded, but in the poem he is "battered, bloodied," "*Lacero, sanguinoso*."

Leopardi's grim metaphysics takes on, in the poem, the painful personal emotion kept in check in the prose. And as we reread the verse after seeing a version of its chief idea in prose, we come to a fuller realization of Leopardi's strictly poetic techniques, noticing not only his sinuous rhythms, his syntactic complexity, and his variations on rhyme (he composed, for instance, a poem on first love in Dante's *terza rima*), but also his recurrent symbolic counters. When a poet returns again and again to a symbolic image of talismanic force, that image loses a part of its factual reference and exists rather as part of an internal mutual system of all its own instances. In this way, experiencing a poem in its full context in the *Canti* is the only way to take its Leopardian measure.

Reading the deathbed poem "*Il tramonto della luna*," or "The Setting of the Moon," for example, with its evenly paced declarations of adult sorrow, one must remember the early "*Alla luna*," or "To the Moon," in which the poet, although in emotional torment, preserves his "*graziosa luna*" in all its ideality, addressing it as "*mia diletta luna*," "my beloved moon." Similarly, in the song of the wandering shepherd, Leopardi addresses the moon as "silent moon," "virgin moon," "unblemished moon," "immortal maiden," and "bright moon," all epithets of ideal beauty. But one also must keep in mind the obverse of this serene and immortal moon in "*Alceta*," which recounts a nightmare in which the moon crashes out of the sky and explodes:

she hit the ground in the middle of
the meadow,
big as a bucket, and vomited

a cloud of sparks that shrieked as loud
as when you dunk a live coal in the
water
and drown it.

After the vomiting and shrieking of the moon-crash comes an even more sinister, even hellish, view: as the moon dies, it is “little by little slowly darkening,/and the grass was smoking all around.” Or, in Leopardi’s gorgeous Italian:

Anzi a quel modo
La luna, come ho detto, in mezzo
al prato
Si spegneva annerando a poco a poco,
E ne fumavan l'erbe intorno intorno.

The last action one expects of the moon is that of (in literal translation) “blackening little by little,” just as the last action one expects of grass is to “issue smoke, around and around.” The echo of “*a poco a poco*” in “*intorno intorno*” cannot be maintained in the English, nor can the eerie effect of six lines in succession all ending in “o” (four of them quoted above). In fact, ten of the poem’s twenty lines end in “o,” the sound keeping the nightmare awake, as the sleeper finds himself “cold with fear.” Leopardi’s moon, like Keats’s nightingale, adjusts itself to fit the pitch of inner emotion.

THE TENSION IN Leopardi’s greatest poetry springs from his admirable determination to speak aloud the real and insignificant state of a human being—“a speck upon a ball,” in Dickinson’s formulation—and his equal determination to give full value to those illusions (hope, love, patriotism) without which life cannot be lived. To know that death is our only destiny, and that individual life is misery, is to live in a dry acknowledgment of the incompatibility between reality and desire, and yet to admit that no one is immune to the fantasies of desire. Leopardi is not a philosopher, and the idea of the insatiability of desire was not new, but he dared to give it voice not in logical or theological exposition but in highly original metaphorical and musical elaboration. In the verse, the paradox of unsatisfiable desire voluntarily pursued recurs, obsessively, literally, symbolically. Leopardi belonged to that tribe that Yeats (also a member) named “the sad, the lonely, the insatiable.”

At twenty-seven, repudiating his early adherence to the “affectionate and eloquent,” Leopardi declared that “I take satisfaction in ever more clearly discovering and tangibly feeling the wretchedness of men and things, and in experiencing a

cold horror, reflecting on this unhappy and terrible strangeness of life in the universe.” Yet honesty compelled him to admit that human ideals, not less than human misery, appear perpetually resurrected in the heart:

Yet I feel the familiar
illusions reviving,
my breast is amazed
at all that it feels.

The Italian, in rhymed stanzas, expresses, aria-like, the amazed lilt of renewed love. Even if unreciprocated, love is exalting:

Pur sento in me rivivere
Gl’inganni aperti e noti;
E de’ suoi proprii moti
Si maraviglia il sen.

AT THE END of his life, living with his friend Ranieri at the foot of Vesuvius (which had recently erupted), Leopardi wrote his greatest poem, “Broom,” addressed to a plant that grows on the bare lava-slopes of the volcano. “Broom,” drawing on Leopardi’s whole life’s writing and reading, and redoing in Vesuvian terms Lucretius’s account in *De Rerum Natura* of the eruption of Etna, expands to a powerful and even violent synthesis, in 317 lines, of the poet’s turbulent and sublime emotions at the spectacle of Nature’s cruelty. When Leopardi—after opening the poem by naming the “terrifying mountain,/Vesuvius the destroyer”—suddenly modulates his tone into a woodwind tenderness as he addresses the broom with the familiar and even familial “*tu*” (impossible to reproduce with our all-purpose formal-and-informal “you”), we are introduced into the fundamental opposition of the poem, between nature’s barbaric destructiveness and the potential intimacy of human feeling. We feel the poet’s empathy with the slender broom, in all its frailty. After an excoriating segment on the volcano’s destruction of Pompeii and the probable repetition of eruption in the future, the end of the poem returns to the humble presence of the transient broom, “*E tu, lenta ginestra*”:

And you too, pliant broom,
adorning this abandoned countryside
with fragrant bushes,
you will soon succumb
to the cruel power of subterranean fire,
which, returning to the place it knew
before,
will spread its greedy tongue
over your soft thickets.

But the doomed plant, unlike man, did not pray cravenly to its destroyer for succor; nor did it delude itself with proudly imagining a destiny for itself among the stars in lieu of its native place in a ruined wasteland. Knowing absolutely and realistically that it is destined to no future state—whether one gained by itself or one assigned by fate—the cherished plant becomes both a model for, and a solace to, the poet. As Leopardi projects his own submission to mortality onto the broom, we assent to its resignation because of the moral grace imputed to it in Leopardi’s grieving words.

Although “Broom,” like many of the poems in the *Canti*, avails itself of rhyme to complicate its cadences, it is Leopardi’s syntax that most impresses the mind. He thinks nothing of writing—here as in the song of the wandering shepherd—a sixteen-line sentence. Since modern syntax does not easily tolerate such complex syntactic relations, Galassi divides Leopardi’s lava flow into two sentences, inserting a period after the first eight lines. Even so, the translation ably maintains the momentum of Leopardi’s cinematic triple exposure—first the wilderness of lava fields through which the poet walks, then the innocent beauty of those same fields before the catastrophe, and finally the exterminating eruption itself:

These fields
strewn with sterile ashes, blanketed
by hardened lava
that echoes to a wanderer’s steps,
where the snake nests and coils
under the sun
and the hare goes home
to his familiar cave-like den—
these were happy, prospering farms.
They were blond with wheat
and echoed with lowing cattle;
here were gardens, villas, welcome
respite for the powerful,
and famous cities, which, with rivers
pouring from its fiery mouth,
the implacable mountain crushed,
along with their inhabitants.

Leopardi’s pre-eruption Eden is a civilized landscape, not merely a pastoral one; it has farms with ripe wheat and classical lowing cows, but it also exhibits man-made gardens and villas for repose; and it even boasts famous cities. As his earthly paradise is crushed by fiery rivers of lava, the poet’s lament intensifies to its elegiac climax: the mountain crushed not only the farms and cities, but their inhabitants too. This sentence, so powerful in both Italian and in Galassi’s English—displaying, as it winds down the length

of the page, its successive phases of aftermath, pre-existence, and extermination—carries the reader along in the wake of its unstoppable course. The reader flinches first at the ashes underfoot, then reposes in the nostalgic flashback in which the landscape reverts to its former beauty, and then is appalled by the inalterable violence of the “implacable mountain.” Sentences upon sentences of this sort illustrate Leopardi’s long flexible structures of thought as they twist through time and space. His long verse-paragraphs in “Broom” could be conceived only by someone meditating, like Wordsworth, “on man, on nature, and on human life.”

As his illness worsened—as his lungs became more and more compressed by spinal torsion, as he underwent pneu-

monia, increased asthma, and dropsy—Leopardi, like his contemporary Keats, was pressed into an accelerated maturity. A description of his considered late style, cited by Galassi, mentions “the disappearance of the ‘I’ into a collective voice: the overwhelming and seemingly conclusive imposition of thinking; the translation of this thinking into imagery; the development, in fact, and often in highly dramatic forms, of the poetry.” In achieving, in the arid landscape of “Broom,” a tragic but classical equilibrium of feeling, thinking, and imagery, in balancing human aspiration with existential despair, in including the lonely individual in the broad nation, Leopardi—at only thirty-eight—engraved on his pages the uncompromising voice of irreligious modernity. ♦

István Deák THE CHARNEL CONTINENT

BLOODLANDS: EUROPE BETWEEN HITLER AND STALIN

By Timothy Snyder
(Basic Books, 524 pp., \$29.95)

‘NOW WE WILL live!’ ... the hungry little boy liked to say ... but the food that he saw was only in his imagination.” So the little boy died, together with three million fellow Ukrainians, in the mass starvation that Stalin created in 1933. “I will meet her ... under the ground,” a young Soviet man said about his wife. Both were shot in the course of Stalin’s Great Terror of 1937 and 1938, which claimed 700,000 victims. “Two hundred thousand Polish citizens were shot by the Soviets or the Germans at the beginning of World War II.” “Only Tania is left,” a little Russian girl wrote in her diary in besieged Leningrad, where the rest of her family and nearly one million other Leningraders starved to death. “I am saying good-bye to you before I die. I am so afraid of this death because they throw small children into the mass graves alive,” a twelve-year-old Jewish girl in Belarus wrote to her father. “She was among the more than five million Jews gassed or shot by the Germans.”

So begins *Bloodlands*, a genuinely shattering report on the ideology, the politi-

cal strategy, and the daily horror of Soviet and Nazi rule in the region that Timothy Snyder calls the bloodlands. In 1933, when the murderous madness began, the bloodlands were made up of independent Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as (within the Soviet Union) Belarus, Ukraine, and some of Soviet Russia’s western provinces. A glance at a map of the same area in 1941 shows that in the intervening years the bloodlands had become two countries: the German Reich and the Soviet Union. Acting in harmony, these two countries swallowed the region’s other countries. Clearly, then, *Bloodlands* is not only the story of hunger, war, and massacre, but also of imperial conquest. And rather than satisfying the two monster states, their imperialism caused them to turn against each other until one disappeared from the map, if only temporarily, while the other triumphed, only to disappear five decades later. In sum: the bloodlands are the area, in Snyder’s view, where the two dictators most effectively demonstrated their ability and their desire to kill.

At first the idea of these “bloodlands” strikes one as arbitrary, but on reflection I have come to appreciate the justice of Snyder’s notion. After all, many more people died in the bloodlands in the 1930s and 1940s—of hunger, typhus, frost, arson, forced labor, torture, and murder—than in all the rest of Europe. The major victims of one or the other killer, or of the two killers acting in unison, were Jews, Poles, ethnic Germans, well-to-do farm-

ers, members of the intelligentsia, and religious and ethnic minorities.

One might object to Snyder’s thesis by arguing that other areas of Europe were similarly affected—Germany, with its half-million civilians annihilated in Allied bombings; or Greece, where 100,000 civilians died during the famine of 1941–1942; or the northern Netherlands, where thousands starved to death early in 1945; or Romania, where 300,000 Jews were wiped out in that country’s own specific Holocaust; or Hungary, where, in 1944, the authorities handed over more than 400,000 Jews to the Germans for extermination; or Yugoslavia, where the civil war resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties; or elsewhere in the Soviet Union, where many ethnic minorities living east of the bloodlands were deported and partly annihilated at the orders of Stalin during and after the war. Those, too, were unprecedentedly dark times and places. And yet one must agree with Snyder that the doubtful honor of having lost the highest proportion of their inhabitants during the war belongs to Poland, the three Baltic countries, Belarus, Ukraine, and parts of western Russia. The tragedy of the other European states pales in comparison.

What made things worse for those in the bloodlands was that while all countries in German hands had to suffer a German military invasion and then, three or four or five years later, another military campaign bringing about their liberation, the people of the bloodlands suffered through three occupations, none of which can really be called a liberation. In 1939, the German army conquered the western half of the bloodlands, and the Soviet Red Army the eastern half. Two years later Germany seized the entire bloodlands. And three years later the Soviets returned, conquering or reconquering the whole territory. Each occupation brought about a complete political, economic, and social reversal. What had been legal and even mandatory in the Polish Republic, for instance, became a crime in German-occupied western and central Poland, as well as in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland; only that in the latter people were punished in the name of principles that were the exact opposite of the principles enunciated in the western or German sector. In 1941, inhuman Nazi laws replaced inhuman Soviet laws, which were again reversed with the expulsion of the German army from Poland in 1944–1945.

Despite their antithetical ideologies, Nazi and Soviet rule in Poland bore many similarities, mainly because both the

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Nazis and the Soviets aimed at the fatal weakening of the Polish nation through the elimination of its military and administrative elite, its clergy, its intelligentsia, and its bourgeoisie. For the purpose of ridding the country of all elements potentially inimical to German and Russian supremacy, it mattered little whether a Polish-speaking merchant in Lwów (Lviv) was deported for being a bourgeois or for being a Jew, or whether a Polish peasant in the Białystok region was shot for being a kulak or for being a subhuman Slav.

TIMOTHY SNYDER did archival research in English, German, Yiddish, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Russian, and French. His learning is extraordinary. His vivid imagination leads him to see combinations, similarities, and general trends where others would see only chaos and confusion, and this inevitably invites heated debate. While Snyder writes with great verve and to highly dramatic effect, he also likes statistics, and his frequent citation of casualty figures, no matter how well researched, leaves him vulnerable: as he himself knows, statistical data on Eastern European or Soviet war deaths are often mere guesses, and tools to bludgeon political adversaries.

Snyder operates with the fundamental statistic that in the bloodlands, between 1933 and 1945, fourteen million civilians fell victim to the rage of soldiers, bureaucrats, policemen, and fellow civilians. Snyder also claims that one-half of all the soldiers killed in World War II died in the bloodlands, which in my view is an exaggeration. (Think, for instance, of the uncounted Chinese soldiers who perished during the war.)

The three main groups of civilian victims of comparable size were Jews killed by Germans, non-Jews killed by Germans, and Soviet citizens killed by their own government. To this, Snyder might have added the Jews and non-Jews killed by Germany's allies. After all, without non-Germans in German service, far fewer Jews, or Poles, or Russians, would have perished. And as Snyder shows, without the Jewish police, who made sure that no Jew would escape the ghetto, more Jews might have been able to avoid deportation to the death camps.

Individual wartime adventures could be incredibly complex for those in the bloodlands. It is not difficult, for example, to conjure the image of a young Ukrainian patriot in what used to be eastern Poland who, just before the outbreak of World War II, is drafted into the Polish army, but following the Soviet invasion

of eastern Poland in September 1939 automatically becomes a Soviet citizen and is drafted into the Soviet army. Captured by the Germans in 1941 and confronted with the choice of starving to death in a POW camp or becoming a policeman in German service, he chooses the latter, and in the next few years he fights Soviet partisans and shoots defenseless Jews. In 1943 or 1944 he goes over to the partisans, as so many other Ukrainian policemen were doing. Soon we find him in a Soviet uniform again, serving in a combat unit. He makes it across Central Europe, fighting against the Germans, but at one point he deserts, joining the countless other Red Army deserters who are indistinguishable from bandits, and who drift behind the combat units. Finally caught and accused of desertion, he ends up in the Gulag. (Let me record here, for what it is worth, that, in January 1945, when the Red Army liberated the great ghetto in Budapest, Jewish survivors urged each other to shed the yellow star because it was rumored among them that the Soviet troops included a great number of Ukrainian former policemen and nationalist guerrillas whose hatred for Jews and Communists continued unabated.)

SNYDER'S BOOK rightly traces the origin of the two tyrannies to World War I, which "brought an obvious opportunity to revolutionaries." When Hitler's revolution triumphed in 1933, the Communists had long been governing the Soviet Union, but only simultaneously with Hitler did they seize complete control, after politics and society, also of the economy. Both Stalin and Hitler lived in dread of encirclement, one by the capitalist powers, the other by Jewish capitalists and Jewish Bolsheviks. This fear caused them to pursue economic self-sufficiency for their respective countries: "Hitler and Stalin, for all of their many differences, presumed that one root of the problem was the agricultural sector, and that the solution was drastic state intervention." For Stalin, drastic intervention translated into forced collectivization; for Hitler, it meant war, which would allow the assimilation, deportation, and enslavement of the Polish and Russian people, as well as the colonization of the eastern lands by armed German farmers. While Stalin wanted to colonize his empire, Hitler hoped to expand the German empire into Poland as well as deep into the Soviet Union. Millions were to die in the effort to bring these dreams to fruition.



The story of Stalin's collectivization drive and the ensuing mass starvation forms perhaps the most dramatic chapter of the book. The description of the Holocaust is too well known to create the same shattering effect. Yet unlike the Holocaust, the hunger in Ukraine of the early 1930s—what the Ukrainians today call the *Holodomor*, "murder by hunger"—aimed "only" at the partial extermination of the Ukrainian nation.

The causes and the motivations of the collectivization drive, and of the ensuing catastrophic starvation in Soviet Ukraine and elsewhere in the Soviet Union, are still being ardently debated, but at least no one would today pretend that the Great Hunger did not happen. This was not always the case. In 1932–1933, and in some cases thereafter, all Soviet leaders, and also such Western observers as the journalists Walter Duranty and Louis Fischer, as well as the former French Prime Minister Édouard Herriot, were in complete denial. The honest reporting of the Welsh journalist Gareth Jones and the British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge was censored by the Western media, so great was the world's sympathetic fascination with the Soviet experiment. And even those who admitted that there was hunger in many parts of the Soviet Union generally advanced the appalling principle of "you cannot make an omelet without breaking a few eggs"—that is, while hunger was regrettable, it was also an economic and political necessity, an indispensable element of modernization.

Snyder rightly sides with those who believe that forced collectivization was not meant to annihilate the Ukrainian population: the atrocity was not a genocide. By reforming agriculture, Stalin hoped to free masses of rural laborers for rapid industrialization. But once hunger set in, due to administrative incompetence and peasant resistance to collectivization, Stalin used the opportunity to crush all real and imaginary enemies in order to prevent the rise of Ukrainian nationalism. Hence the Moscow Party center's violent attacks on the Ukrainian Party bosses, who were alternately accused of being too hard *and* too soft on the peasants. The Kremlin also blamed Polish military counterintelligence for creating the famine.

Snyder demonstrates that instead of alleviating the suffering in the Ukrainian countryside, the Soviet leadership did its best to aggravate the consequences of the bad harvest and the ensuing starvation.

ANTHONY RUSSO

The peasantry as a whole was treated as a bunch of saboteurs and wreckers. Since delivery quotas were impossible to fulfill, brigades made up of mobilized industrial workers descended on the countryside to beat up the peasants and to sweep their granaries clean. Those suspected of slaughtering their livestock were shot or taken to concentration camps. Having been denied internal passports, the starving peasants were forbidden to enter the cities. They could not even go to a hospital. Thousands died at railroad stations, on the roadside, or in the villages. Historically, at times of hunger, producers have more to eat than consumers, but in this instance the producers were worse off than those in the cities, who received ration tickets denied to the peasants.

A part of the peasantry, usually but not always the more prosperous among them, were branded “kulaks” and subjected to particular persecution. In some ways, kulaks were treated like the Jews in Nazi Germany—for example, the authorities publicly proclaimed that kulak criminality was hereditary and could not be alleviated even by the family’s surrendering its land to the state. Indeed, the idea of hereditary kulak criminality thrived even after the war, encompassing the entire Soviet bloc. In Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania, “kulaks and kulak brats” were sent to prison for failing to feed their livestock, but also for trying to buy fodder or bread in the cities in order to feed their livestock. They were accused of sabotaging socialist production, and of conspiring with the Titoist and American enemy.

The most terrible pages in Snyder’s account of the Great Hunger are the ones that describe incidents of cannibalism. Ukrainian villagers first ate corpses, but later some also killed and devoured their own children, or children devoured their parents. Someone, a hardy soul, ought to write a scholarly study of cannibalism in Eastern Europe during the 1930s and 1940s, not only in Ukraine but also in besieged Leningrad, among Soviet soldiers in German POW camps, and even, occasionally, in Soviet POW camps for German and other soldiers. Intriguingly, there seem to exist no reports on cannibalism among Jews in German concentration camps. This must have been due to the fact that such Jews who had not been shot or gassed were put to work, and given some food. Death by hunger began in the German concentration camps only in the last few months of the war, when the Nazi system of semi-starving the inmates was no longer functioning.

In the first years of Operation Barbarossa, Soviet POWs in German camps were given nothing. I recall, from 1944, the skeletal Soviet POWs who were working on a railroad in Transylvania, to whom members of a neighboring Hungarian Jewish labor company tried to pass some bread—and were punished for their daring. It is, incidentally, one of Snyder’s many theses that inmates in Nazi and Soviet concentration camps had a much better chance of survival than Jews in the hands of the German security police in Belorussian and Ukrainian towns, or Jews expedited to such death camps as Treblinka, or the Soviet POWs in German camps, or Ukrainian peasants during the great hunger.

WHAT DID STALIN achieve with his brutal collectivization drive? Industrialization and modernization could have been more successful by attracting peasants to the cities and the factories, rather than killing them in the villages. As for the crushing of Ukrainian or other minority nationalisms: in the summer of 1941, when the German army raced through Ukraine, there was certainly no shortage of Ukrainians who hailed the new arrivals as ushering in the dawn of their freedom and independence.

The Soviet leadership proceeded, with almost no transition, from killing off the peasants to killing off the Party members and the elites in general. By the time the Great Terror started, in 1937, Soviet diplomacy had changed from isolationism to a Popular Front policy, favoring co-operation with all progressive patriots against the fascist Hitlerite menace. Yet at home the terror campaign reached its height at that time, including the Great Show Trials, a uniquely nightmarish procedure. During its course, countless alleged conspirators, saboteurs, wreckers, German, Polish, and Japanese spies, Trotskyites, and Social Democratic traitors were tortured, tried, and executed, or executed without a trial.

No doubt Stalin’s fear of a capitalist attack on the Soviet Union played a role in this horrendous affair: after all, Japan and Germany had signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936, and they were soon joined by other countries. Still, the Great Terror was madness. Snyder calls the Great Terror the third revolution in the Soviet Union and argues, convincingly yet controversially, that this “third revolution was really a counterrevolution, implicitly acknowledging that Marxism and Leninism had failed.” In other words, the Great Terror was a recognition that

people were defined not by class, by their place in the socioeconomic order, but by their personal identities and their cultural connections.

Snyder explains well how the original Bolshevik emphasis on class struggle changed to an emphasis on fighting foreign infiltrators: even kulaks were branded as foreigners or foreign agents, and so were the foreign Communists who had sought asylum in the Soviet Union. The principal victims of the Great Terror, however, were not Nikolai Bukharin and other Soviet Communist leaders, and not even the Polish or other foreign Communists, but ordinary foreign nationals, many of whom had been living in Russia for generations. “In 1937 and 1938,” writes Snyder, “a quarter of a million Soviet citizens were shot on essentially ethnic grounds. . . . Stalin was a pioneer of national mass murder, and the Poles were the preeminent victim among the Soviet nationalities.” To be more precise, “of the 143,810 people arrested under the accusation of espionage for Poland, 111,091 were executed.”

What could so many people have spied on? But the charge of mass spying was no more absurd than the accusation raised against others that they had conspired to assassinate Stalin. The renowned Hungarian-American ceramicist and designer Eva Zeisel, who lives in New York and at the age of 103 may be the last survivor of the Great Terror, was arrested in 1936 while working in Moscow, and was accused of being among those who plotted the murder of Stalin. After one and a half years of interrogation and imprisonment, she was suddenly expelled from the Soviet Union. In Paris, she met her old friend Arthur Koestler, to whom the story of her experiences was of great consequence when writing *Darkness at Noon*.

Besides the kulaks and the Polish, German, Finnish, Latvian, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Bulgarian, and other settlers, the Great Terror targeted Communist political refugees so thoroughly that, after 1938, only a fraction of the Polish and Hungarian Communist Party leaders were still alive in the Soviet Union. Famously, foreign Communists had a suitcase packed at all times in their Moscow hotel rooms while awaiting and dreading their arrest.

Lastly, there were the purges carried out within the high and even the highest Soviet leadership. No one will ever satisfactorily explain why 98 out of the 139 members of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and one-half of the generals in the Soviet armed forces were executed. It must be admitted that, at least with respect to the military,

Stalin's madness was only temporary, and that the German General Staff made a great mistake in interpreting the Great Terror as a sign of the fatal weakness of the Soviet armed forces. In part, Soviet officers released from the Gulag were the ones who, between 1941 and 1945, defeated the Nazis.

SNYDER MAKES the reader grasp the fundamental differences in how Eastern Europeans perceived the Soviets and the Germans. At the start of the war in 1939, the German invaders appeared as invincible demigods, while the Soviet invaders often inspired ridicule: "The Soviet citizens who ruled eastern Poland were falling off bicycles, eating toothpaste, using toilets as sinks, wearing multiple watches, or bras as earmuffs, or lingerie as evening gowns." In Budapest in 1945 we had the same impression, and thus the same sense of superiority over the "Mongols" of the Red Army. To which the soldiers might have retorted that if they were so poor and so backward, why did the Germans, the Hungarians, and others come to their country to steal and to destroy what little they had?

The highly civilized Germans had no trouble with toothpaste; but their soldiers stole with abandon in the occupied Eastern territories, and they immediately began shooting Jews as well as captive Polish soldiers and civilians. The killings and the expulsions were at first sporadic, but gradually it became clear that both the Germans and the Soviets were aiming at the decapitation of Polish society. Whereas the Germans deported entire university faculties, the Soviets found a harsher solution for getting rid of the Polish elite: at Katyn, and elsewhere in Russia, they murdered at least 22,000 Polish reserve officers (that is, civilians in uniform) and other members of the middle class. Snyder writes: "The chief executioner at Kalinin... was Vasily Blokhin. He had been one of the main killers during the Great Terror... At Kalinin he wore a leather cap, apron and long gloves to keep the blood and gore from himself and his uniform. Using German pistols, he shot, each night, about two hundred and fifty [Polish] men, one after another." None of his victims ever saw Blokhin because he shot them from behind.

For the Soviet forces in Poland and the Baltic countries, Jews were a useful prop, because in their fear of local anti-Semitism many Jews were prepared to offer their services to the Soviets. Yet other Jews were deported to the Soviet East as bourgeois capitalists, and hundreds of them were shot at Katyn and elsewhere

as officers in the Polish army. For the Germans, the sudden presence of a huge number of Jews represented an immediate dilemma. Snyder is persuaded that, until 1941, the Germans did not plan to annihilate European Jewry. Terror and shootings, yes—but the main goal was to push the Jews outside the continent, to Madagascar, or to Stalin's empire. Only when it turned out that the Madagascar solution was not practicable, and that Stalin would not want them, and that not even Hans Frank, the Nazi governor of central Poland, would accept any more Jews, did the Nazi leaders begin to think of a more drastic solution.

AND EVEN THEN, Snyder says, the Nazis' decision to murder all the Jews of Europe was hastened by their inability, after June 22, 1941, to defeat the Soviet Union. When the sacred goal of wiping out Bolshevism proved impossible, the great task remaining was ridding Europe of the Jewish menace. It is conceivable that if Hitler had been victorious against the Soviet Union, then the Jews, the Poles, and millions of other Eastern Europeans might not have been killed, but shoved instead east into Soviet territories that the German agrarian interests did not covet for themselves. According to Snyder, the same Wehrmacht generals who at first were convinced that murdering the Jews would somehow bring the war to a triumphant conclusion later decided that "the killing of Jews was necessary, not because the war was about to be won, as Himmler and Hitler could still believe in summer 1941, but because the war could easily be lost." Whatever the justification, the Nazi Party bosses and the SS and Wehrmacht commanders in the East were in agreement that the Jews had to die.

There could never be any doubt regarding extreme German brutality toward the inhabitants of the Soviet Union. Nazi plans, conceived even before Barbarossa, envisioned the razing of such great Soviet cities as Leningrad and Kiev, and the starving or shooting of millions of Slavs and Jews. Hitler, Göring, Himmler, and others were persuaded, especially following the failure of the 1941 campaign, that the choice was between feeding those in the occupied Soviet territories and feeding Germans. As the Germans were the ones to be fed, the others would have to die. Only late in the war did it occur to some Nazi leaders that the millions of Jews and Soviet POWs represented an invaluable labor force, and that many non-Jewish Soviet citizens would even be prepared to fight on the German side.

By the end of the war, one million Soviet citizens were helping the Germans with arms. Many more were working in the factories and the fields. Jews, too, were put to work in huge numbers in the German war industry, such as at Auschwitz. What the Germans never really understood was that in order to make slave labor a success, slaves must be humanely treated and decently fed.

WITH THE START of Barbarossa, in Snyder's account, the bloodlands entered their third and last period. The first was between 1933 and 1938, when the Soviets alone did the killings; the second phase, from 1939 to 1941, was marked by Germans and Soviets sharing in the task; and the third lasted from 1941 to 1945, when the Germans were mainly responsible for the mass murders.

It is well known that the proportional distribution of Holocaust casualties in Europe was very uneven. In Denmark and Bulgaria, almost no Jews were killed; in Poland, the Baltic countries, and (surprisingly) the Netherlands, almost all the Jews were killed. With the exception of an extraordinary case such as the Netherlands, the highest proportion of victims was concentrated in the bloodlands. The German and Austrian Jews had emigrated to the West in their absolute majority, and in Hungary and Romania, around forty percent survived the war—but in the bloodlands the survival rate was much smaller. In areas within the bloodlands that the Germans occupied in 1939, their long presence made the "success" of the Final Solution inevitable. While shooting was the fate of most Jews in the areas of the bloodlands that the Germans conquered in 1941, gassing was the lot of Jews from central and western Poland as well as from the rest of Europe. It should be noted that the gassing started much later than the shooting, and that its first victims were not Jews but mostly Soviet prisoners of war.

In areas where the Germans arrived only in the summer of 1941, it was their grim determination to do a thorough job—as well as the assistance they received from the local population—that led to such harrowing results. And the main reason for the pogroms east of the Molotov-Ribbentrop line was that when the Soviets fled, in the summer of 1941, the NKVD—the Soviet secret police—left behind the corpses of thousands upon thousands of political prisoners, whom it had murdered in the last moment. The local population, from Estonia down to southern Ukraine, perceived

the Soviet political police as a Jewish institution and the NKVD massacres as the work of the Jews.

Following detailed and lucid analyses of the Eastern European events in the last years of the war, especially of those in Poland (where the author's heart is), Snyder devotes a long chapter to the orgy of ethnic cleansing that followed upon the Soviet victories, and in which millions of German civilians but also Poles, Ukrainians, Hungarians, and others fell victim. As Snyder's narrative nears its end it becomes increasingly difficult to bear the avalanche of statistics on rape, murder, bestiality, and arson. But this is the historical truth. In the bloodlands and the rest of Eastern Europe, the story of the last year of the war was not of Parisian beauties climbing on American tanks to kiss grinning soldiers. In the East, the story of the last year of the war and of the first postwar years was that of Red Army soldiers raping German women, and not only German women; of refugees freezing to death on the highways leading to Germany; of the Soviets disarming and even arresting Polish anti-Nazi resisters; of Poles and other East Europeans murdering Jews who had had the arrogance to survive the camps and dared to ask for their belongings; of Jewish survivors flocking into the Communist political police; of other Jews being arrested by the Communist political police; and of still other Jews fleeing Eastern Europe forever.

SNYDER ENDS HIS unbearable tale with an eloquent plea. "The Nazi and Soviet regimes turned people into numbers," he writes. "It is for us as humanists to turn the numbers back into people. If we cannot do that, then Hitler and Stalin have shaped not only our world but our humanity." That is exactly right. This is an important book. I have never seen a book like it. But even Snyder does not broach the problem of explanation. *Why* was there so much savagery in the bloodlands? The comportment of the Germans remains a mystery. When occupying Western Europe in 1940, German soldiers tried to behave as perfect gentlemen, and they committed occasional atrocities only after heavy provocation by resistance groups. In Poland, by contrast, the German soldiers acted as mass murderers from the very start, and they did so in every Eastern European country they occupied in the following years. The young Austrian policeman who in a letter to his bride described how satisfactory it was to throw Jewish children in the air in order to do target practice with

his pistol was not typical, but he was not a great rarity either.

One "understands" the fanatics who engaged in atrocities when their ideology so demanded. But the majority of the Wehrmacht officers were not fanatics, and not even Nazi Party members; in fact, hundreds among them participated in the anti-Nazi resistance movement. And yet they burned down villages and ordered the massacre of villagers without hesitation. Perhaps the Germans (as well as the Romanians, Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats, and even the Finns) acted in the old European tradition of respecting international humanitarian agreements in the case of similarly "civilized" enemies—and in disregarding the agreements in the case of "natives." For Central and Eastern Europeans, everything to their east always seemed less civilized—a territory worthy of colonization.

With regard to the Soviets, we have learned in an abundance of scholarship how millions of Soviet citizens died under the peacetime tyranny of Stalin; and how, during the war, Ukrainians and other ethnic minorities greeted the German troops as liberators; and how a huge

number of Soviet citizens would have been happy to join the fight against Stalin had Hitler allowed more of them to do so. But if this was the case, then how do we explain the miracle of dedicated popular defense against the German onslaught: the soldiers who attacked in wave after wave while being mowed down by German machine guns, and the civilians, mostly women, who transported entire factories beyond the Urals and started production there while personally being without shelter? All this could not have been the result of coercion: even the NKVD could not have put a policeman behind every soldier, worker, and peasant. Soviet troops could simply have gone home, as they had in 1917. Instead they fought and worked under physical conditions that we in the West could never fathom. Nor can Russian or Soviet patriotism be the solution to the puzzle, because only one-half of the Soviet citizens were Russians, and because Soviet patriotism was nothing but make-believe. And yet the Red Army utterly defeated the Germans. I would have loved to have Timothy Snyder speculate on the incredible contradictions in Soviet behavior. ♦

Yossi Klein Halevi GLORY

**WHEN THEY COME FOR US
WE'LL BE GONE:**

**THE EPIC STRUGGLE TO
SAVE SOVIET JEWRY**

By Gal Beckerman
(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt,
598 pp., \$30)

BY THE STANDARDS of the 1960s, the founding demonstration of the Soviet Jewry movement was hardly notable. On May 1, 1964, a thousand students gathered across from the Soviet mission to the United Nations in Manhattan to protest a Soviet ban on baking matzo and other anti-Jewish measures. Compared to demonstrators for the far better known causes of the time, they were a tame lot. No one blocked traffic or scuffled with police. Instead, protesters marched in a circle so orderly that one reporter commented on how refreshingly responsible these young people were, which was damning praise for a movement aspiring to change history.

Yet that is precisely the process that was set in motion by the May Day dem-

onstration. The struggle to free Soviet Jewry would become one of history's most successful protest movements, a sustained quarter-century-long campaign that lost none of its fervor and encompassed ever-widening circles of participants. Though the movement failed to persuade the Soviet Union to permit the free baking of matzo, it went on to fulfill its most improbable goal: forcing open the Iron Curtain and restoring to the Jewish people several million Jews marked by the Kremlin for coerced assimilation. In the process, American Jewry discovered its political power and its spiritual vitality, as a once-timid community learned to become a vigorous advocate of Jewish interests. This was the pre-history of the élan that American Jewry acquired in the wake of the Six Day War a few years later.

The movement's significance transcends its impact on Jewish history. In the mid-'70s, Congress adopted the Jackson-Vanik amendment linking trade credits for the Soviet Union to its Jewish emigration policy. By mobilizing Congress to override a reluctant White House, the

movement helped to establish the principle that human rights supersede national sovereignty, that democracies are morally bound to intervene in the internal affairs of dictatorships. The Soviet Jewry movement in America was also a milestone in modern humanitarian politics.

And, according to Gal Beckerman's superb and likely definitive narrative of the Soviet Jewry struggle, the movement deserves credit even for helping to hasten the fall of the Soviet Union. Deftly moving between the Soviet Union and the United States, the two main arenas of the struggle, Beckerman shows how Jewish activists on one side of the Iron Curtain emboldened Jewish activists on the other. The more risks Soviet Jews took in challenging their government, the more American Jews intensified their campaign, in turn further encouraging Soviet Jews, who initiated acts unprecedented for Soviet citizens, such as sit-ins at government offices. The "refuseniks," as Jews denied exit visas were known, created the Soviet Union's only mass dissident movement that spanned the USSR, and the vigorous support of Jews abroad provided a measure of immunity, ensuring that refuseniks would not become anonymous and therefore extinguishable targets. By weakening the capacity of the Soviet system to instill fear, the movement eroded the self-confidence of Soviet leaders. "Zionism is making us stupid," Beckerman quotes Leonid Brezhnev complaining to his Politburo. In effect, the Kremlin was confronted with a bleak choice: either renew Stalinist-era repression or concede defeat. Soviet leaders tried to respond with a third, and more ambiguous, approach: allow some refuseniks to emigrate while jailing others and keeping still others in limbo. That process failed because every exit visa pried from the Kremlin only convinced activists to intensify the pressure.

BY ANY REALISTIC measure, the movement's chances of success were minimal. How would a handful of students in New York influence the world's most powerful totalitarian empire? Would they even manage to rouse American Jewry? There was, after all, little tradition of American Jewish activism, at least not for Jewish causes. Most American Jews greeted the founding of the movement with skepticism or indifference. The established Jewish organizations preferred sporadic action to an ongoing campaign to save Soviet Jewry. The ultra-Orthodox—who had been wrong about every Jewish rescue and defense effort of the twentieth century—

were predictably hostile, insisting that activism would only provoke the Kremlin's anger and harm Soviet Jews.

And did Soviet Jews even want to be saved? Several generations had grown up without the most minimal Jewish education. The Soviet regime had declared war on memory, banning Jewish schools, books, publications. (The lone Yiddish-language magazine, *Sovietish Heimland*, or *Soviet Homeland*, was exactly what its title suggested.) The handful of synagogues that had not been shut down were controlled by informers to prevent any but the elderly from worshipping there. In those early years there was one tantalizing hint of Jewish rebellion, word of which reached the West: the gathering at the last remaining Moscow synagogue of thousands of young people who came every year on the festival of Simchat Torah to dance and to sing Jewish songs whose words they scarcely knew. But that apparently was an aberration, the last protest of a dying people.

The strategy for the American movement was provided by Yaakov Birnbaum, an Orthodox Jew from England with a Vandyke beard and a Panama hat. The grandson of Nathan Birnbaum, who coined the term "Zionism" and then abandoned Jewish nationalism for ultra-Orthodoxy, Birnbaum was a similarly restless soul who had worked with Holocaust survivors and with North African Jewish refugees in France. He arrived in New York in 1964 and, at the age of thirty-seven, founded what would become the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, which led the movement in its early years and sponsored that first May Day protest.

Beckerman's portrayal of Birnbaum as a slightly hysterical figure is one of the few false notes in his book. Birnbaum, whom I knew in those years, was indeed a very intense man; but he was at the same time a visionary and a sober political analyst. His intuition was that the Soviet Union's economic failures left it dependent on American trade and vulnerable to pressure on the Jewish issue. While Beckerman credits Birnbaum with initiating the street protests for Soviet Jewry, in fact he did much more. Birnbaum articulated the strategy that would turn a peripheral movement of students into a political force shaping Soviet-American relations. The first stage would be to inspire young American Jews with a Jewish cause; and they in turn would pressure the Jewish establishment, which alone had the resources to mobilize the Jewish community for a serious protest movement. Finally an

aroused American Jewry would pressure Washington into linking trade with the Soviet Union to concessions on their treatment of the Jews. It would take a quarter of a century, concluded Birnbaum, for the fight to be won. All his predictions were fulfilled.

Shortly after the May Day demonstration, I joined the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry and for the next decade the movement became the center of my life. (I play a role in Beckerman's narrative.) I joined in part because of shame for Jewish passivity during the Holocaust—not the supposed "sheep to the slaughter" passivity of the victims, but the failure of American Jews to attempt to rescue them. And now American Jews were failing to rescue the survivors stranded in the Soviet Union. When Elie Wiesel published *The Jews of Silence*, an account of his journey among Soviet Jews, the Student Struggle responded with a button that said, "Are We the Jews of Silence?" Shame created a desperate optimism: *we* were not going to lose more millions of Jews.

The Student Struggle was a threadbare organization of a few dozen activists without a budget. It was headquartered in a condemned building near Columbia University; leaflets, printed on both sides of the page to save paper, were piled in the bathtub and the dumbwaiter. Sometimes there was no money for ink to run the mimeograph machine. We turned scarcity into a virtue, holding rallies in small halls and then issuing press releases boasting of overflow crowds. We held a rally at lunchtime in the Garment Center and the newspapers reported an attendance of thousands, unaware that most were curious passersby briefly stopping at our sound truck. To the chagrin of the Jewish establishment, leading politicians attended our protests.

MEANWHILE, UNKNOWN to us in the West, a Zionist underground in the Soviet Union was forming around Holocaust commemoration. It began in the Rumbuli forest near Riga, where thousands of Jews were buried in mass graves. Attempts to mark the site were thwarted by the authorities, and Rumbuli became a place of defiant pilgrimage. Resisting the suppression of Holocaust memory became a catalyst for rebellion against the untenable position of the Soviet Jews, denied any positive Jewish identity but forbidden, because of state and popular anti-Semitism, entirely or smoothly to assimilate.

Still, the decisive influence on Soviet Jews was not the Holocaust. It was the

state of Israel. The wound gave way to pride: the Six Day War turned tens of thousands of Soviet men and women of Jewish origin into identifying Jews openly alienated from Soviet society and seeking to emigrate. Like other Jews around the world, Soviet Jews experienced the whole emotional trajectory: anxiety for Israel's survival in the weeks before the war, then relief and exultation at the astonishing victory. But for Soviet Jews, routinely subjected to taunts about Jewish cowardice ("Ivan fought at the front," went one popular Russian saying about World War II, "while Abram hid in Tashkent"), Israel's military prowess meant something more: that the anti-Semites were wrong. Young Jews in Moscow greeted each other by placing a hand over one eye, simulating the eyepatch of Israel's Defense Minister Moshe Dayan. Two days after the war, a twenty-year-old Moscow student named Yasha Kazakov wrote a letter to the Kremlin renouncing his Soviet citizenship and declaring himself a citizen of Israel in absentia. "I demand to be freed from the humiliation of being considered a citizen of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," he wrote.

That unprecedented letter—what sane person would draw the KGB's attention by renouncing citizenship of a country that had no intention of letting him leave?—was smuggled abroad and excerpted in *The Washington Post*. Immediately afterward, Kazakov was given a visa to Israel. (Kazakov Hebraicized his name to Kedmi and went on to fight in the Yom Kippur War in a tank with Ehud Barak, and later became head of the government's secret office dealing with Soviet Jewry.) Kazakov's daring and his success validated two of Birnbaum's intuitions: that a spark of Jewishness remained among young Soviet Jews, and that exposure in the West would free them.

Hundreds of letters followed—from a Kiev engineer named Boris Kochubievsky, who was ready to leave "to the homeland of my ancestors, even if it means going on foot"; from eighteen families in Soviet Georgia vowing to "wait months and years . . . all our lives if necessary" for visas to Israel; from a young woman from Riga named Ruth Alexandrovich, arrested days before her wedding. You in the West are our only hope, the letter writers pleaded: the silence of the West is the Kremlin's greatest ally. For all the refusenik heroism that was to follow, nothing quite equaled the daring of those first letter writers, defying a half-century of enforced anonymity and as-

serting their right to a public voice, to a name. In the Student Struggle, we memorized their letters like prayers.

The Kremlin's response to the Jewish awakening was a hysterical anti-Semitic campaign thinly disguised as anti-Zionism. Factory workers were summoned to lectures about the unique evils of Jewish nationalism; newspaper cartoons depicted Israeli soldiers with grotesque noses and swastika armbands. Zionists were accused of the most monstrous crimes, from deliberately murdering Palestinian babies to collaborating with the Nazis. Nothing less than world peace was threatened by Zionist aggression. The problem with "Abram," it turned out, was not that he didn't know how to fight, but that he fought all too well. The notion of Zionism as racism was born in the Soviet Union; and so, too, was the ease with which anti-Zionism may mutate into anti-Semitism.

THE EMERGENCE OF the refuseniks transformed the Soviet Jewry movement in America. Our cause was no longer an abstract struggle to restore religious and cultural rights, but a personal campaign for people we felt we almost knew. Our initial slogan, "Let them live or let them leave," was replaced with the unambiguous "Let my people go." Eventually even the American Jewish establishment could no longer avoid a systematic campaign of protest—especially after the trial in Leningrad in 1970 of refuseniks who had plotted to steal a plane and fly it to Israel. That trial focused world attention on the oppression of Soviet Jewry.

Activists on both sides of the Iron Curtain became expert at outwitting the Kremlin's attempt to suppress information about the refuseniks. Protest letters were smuggled out by sympathetic Western diplomats; foreign journalists based in Moscow protected refuseniks by publicly naming them. From the other side of the Iron Curtain came Jewish books and ritual objects, delivered by emissaries pretending to be tourists. Years before the Iron Curtain was officially lifted, it had become thoroughly permeable.

The struggle over the Jackson-Vanik amendment was a case in point. The Nixon administration opposed the amendment as a threat to détente, and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger tried to bully Jewish leaders into rescinding their support. When some leaders wavered, refuseniks in Moscow, risking arrest for treason, wrote an open letter to American Jews warning against retreat on the amendment. "Brothers, be strong!"

they demanded. That message, coming from men and women facing exile to Siberia, was intended to shame. I was in Moscow at the time, and I brought out the letter.

By the mid-'70s, a transformed Jewish establishment was leading the movement. Thanks to Jackson-Vanik, a new generation of Jewish leaders learned how to lobby Congress and, no less important, how to resist White House pressure. Jackson-Vanik was the moment that American Jewry repudiated the legacy of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the pre-eminent American Jewish leader during the Holocaust, who failed to challenge President Roosevelt on Jewish rescue. Through the Soviet Jewry movement, moreover, a beautiful symbiotic relationship emerged between the freest Jews in the Diaspora and the most oppressed. By publicly expressing their solidarity with Soviet Jews, American Jews overcame their inhibitions and assumed their place within American society as a self-confident community. The courage shown today by American Jewish leaders in standing with Israel against the growing effort to delegitimize it, and to stand against an administration intent on weakening the American-Israeli relationship, is a legacy of the Soviet Jewry movement.

THE WISE TEMPERAMENT of the Soviet Jewry movement largely avoided the self-referential rage of other protest movements in the 1960s. Earnestly mainstream, a movement of mere "students and housewives": this was how a KGB agent disparagingly described the movement to the refusenik Natan Sharansky. But its moderation attracted a wide coalition of supporters that gave the movement its longevity. Soviet Jewry rallies were safe.

The movement succeeded also because it spoke both the language of Jewish interests and the language of universal human rights. One of our first demonstrations was a weeklong interfaith fast; Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders joined the campaign. The world's conscience, insisted Birnbaum, who stubbornly believed in the existence of such a thing, would be roused for our cause. He repeated the words "public opinion" so often that they evoked for me a concrete image: a disciplined and organized force waiting, in his phrase, to be "galvanized."

Birnbaum challenged the post-Holocaust Jewish pessimism that tends to divide the world between those who want the Jews dead and those who are merely neutral about it. Not so, countered Birn-

baum: the redemption of Soviet Jewry would be a part of a messianic awakening of oppressed peoples everywhere. Many of our protests were held opposite the United Nations at the Isaiah Wall, and the prophetic words engraved on it, "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation," were the basis for one of our fervent Hebrew songs. We looked across the street with hope: surely the world body established partly in response to the Holocaust would hear our case. (Who can imagine such hope today?) Birnbaum was proud that his birthday, December 10, coincided with U.N. Human Rights Day.

Body and Mask

In the Villa Doria Pamphili,
I saw a carved plaque set into a wall,
quite unremarkable,
just the usual *lotto di putti*,
the contest between cherubs, but then I
saw that one of the two
had wriggled his way somehow
inside the mask of tragedy,
the way a dog might flail blindly,
its forequarters stuck in a paper sack,
but more cunning than that, and not stuck,
having crawled in deliberately
(in the same way an apprentice of Cellini
hid his lover inside a bronze head of Mars,
her nude flank like the whites of its eyes),
the cherub's buttocks protruding impudently,
and one arm reaching, as if in play,
through the mask's gaping mouth-hole
toward ripe fruit in a bowl,
intentional and greedy.
On the far side of quince, plum and cherry,
I noticed the other,
his face ajar with horror.
What he had thought dead was alive, clearly:
that plump arm like a tongue, obscenely
determined to remain among
the pleasures of the living:
so that to say the tragic contains comedy,
or to marvel over the way
what is dead, done, finished off
may yet startle by its galvanic life,
its instinctive reaching for joy,
still misses the point of this ordinary
lesson cut in Luni marble,
which concerns instead the inevitable
fit of body and mask, their strange intimacy.

KARL KIRCHWEY

THE MOVEMENT'S TWO achievements—mainstream respectability and outreach to non-Jews—were threatened by the brief but furious emergence of Rabbi Meir Kahane and his Jewish Defense League. The Brooklyn-born Kahane founded the JDL in 1968, as a vigilante group to protect Jews in inner-city neighborhoods. Two years later he turned Soviet Jewry into his main focus, leading his followers in riots at the Soviet mission to the United Nations; some went underground and bombed Soviet offices in New York and Washington. The cause of Soviet Jewry, that most gentle of protest movements, now had its Black Panthers.

I was intrigued. Kahane appealed to my growing impatience with the respectability of the Student Struggle, which opposed civil disobedience even as refuseniks were becoming increasingly bold in their own protests. It was time to take the Soviet Jewry issue off the obituary page and put it on page one, Kahane said beguilingly. The media reinforced his argument by rewarding his violence. Reporters covered the most minor JDL demonstrations, just in case Kahane's boys provided any action. By contrast, the Student Struggle had to plead at times for coverage. After an arrest of refuseniks, I helped organize a Student Struggle vigil at the United Nations. When no reporters came, I phoned a local radio station and said, "Do we have to smash windows to get you out here?" Shortly afterward, a reporter from the station appeared. "Which one's the window smasher?" he asked.

I left the Student Struggle and joined the JDL, and yielded to the ecstasy of rage. It was 1971 and I was seventeen, a hardened veteran of the Soviet Jewry movement. Together with my new comrades I harassed Soviet diplomats on the streets of New York and disrupted performances by Soviet artists in concert halls. Violence as theater: it was a common phenomenon. But in the symbolic world of the militant, even ballet dancers may

stand in for jailers. Kahane's cunning was to provide occasionally noble moments too, such as getting arrested with a thousand young people peacefully sitting in the streets of Washington—doing what Jewish leaders did not do during the Holocaust, he reminded us.

Kahane offered his young followers from peripheral Jewish neighborhoods outside of Manhattan an entry onto the main stage. Astonishingly, our petty harassment campaign—"Hey Igor, got one of those hats for me?" I taunted a diplomat in a fur hat emerging from the Soviet mission—created the worst crisis in years in Soviet-American relations. What a joke, we exulted: yeshiva kids from Brooklyn making headlines by cursing Soviet diplomats. But that was the point. We no longer were just yeshiva kids from Brooklyn. We were outlaws and power-brokers. Being of keen interest to *The New York Times*, even for opprobrium, made us a part of its world.

The JDL was a revolt against the American Jewish ethos of inoffensive Jewishness, of "nice Irvingism," as Kahane called it. But the real price for entry into the JDL experience was legitimizing terrorism. Even those of us who did not place bombs in public places were obliged to defend those who did, the self-sacrificing saints of the movement. Terrorism as a moral principle—the phrase would not have seemed so terrible to me then—is based on the revolutionary's notion that there are no innocents: bystanders are willfully helpless witnesses—and therefore accomplices—to atrocity. And since there is no pain like my pain, I am permitted to use any means to ease it.

The JDL's undeniable achievement was to do precisely what Kahane promised: it placed the issue on page one by convincing a shameless media that the Soviet Jewry cause was "serious" enough to inspire violence. But no less fortuitous for the Soviet Jewry movement than the JDL's appearance was its rapid disappearance. Fittingly, the end of its Soviet Jewry period was a death by firebombing. In 1972, a secretary, a Jewish woman, was killed by smoke inhalation in a JDL attack on the office of Sol Hurok, the impresario of Soviet-American cultural exchange. Investigated, demoralized, the JDL declined soon afterward.

Its involvement in the Soviet Jewry cause had lasted barely two tumultuous years. Kahane, until now merely thuggish, resurfaced in Israel as leader of the farthest religious right, no longer engaged with liberating Soviet Jewry but with expelling Palestinians from Israel. He fashioned a racist theology that defined

vengeance against non-Jews as an essential principle of Judaism. The roots of that theology can be traced to Kahane's Soviet Jewry period. No less than the argument over violence, the debate between the JDL and the mainstream movement was over the relationship between Jews and "the world," as JDL members referred to the rest of humanity. Kahane dismissed as delusion the movement's outreach to non-Jewish allies. He invoked the wisdom of the medieval ghetto: "Esau hates Jacob," the goy hates the Jew.

THE PASSAGE OF the Jackson-Vanik amendment and the emergence of Congress as the active defender of Soviet Jewry fatally discredited Kahane's Jewish isolationism. Refuseniks were blessed with a succession of bipartisan American protectors—Senator Henry M. Jackson, President Jimmy Carter (well-intentioned, Beckerman notes, but clumsy and ineffectual), President Ronald Reagan, and Secretary of State George Shultz, who hosted a Passover seder for refuseniks in the American embassy in Moscow. The movement proved that Jewish interests are best served when Jews promote their agenda alongside universal values.

The movement's greatest tactical advantage was its ability to function through a transnational people. Even when the protests were small, they were magnified by their ubiquitousness—a Soviet dance troupe in Melbourne met by protesters distributing fake programs exposing Soviet anti-Semitism, a Soviet ship docked in Los Angeles spray-painted with a Star of David. Peoplehood was at once the ideological and the functional basis of the movement. Birnbaum called his young activists "historical Jews," who felt a kinship to all other Jews simply for remaining Jewish. Historical consciousness energized the movement not only with indignation, but also with patience: from the perspective of the Jewish millennia, a struggle of several decades seemed a reasonable period of time in which to generate a second exodus.

While the Soviet Jewry movement was arguably the Diaspora's great post-Holocaust achievement, only Israel ensured its success. Israel's role in the struggle was complicated. It prodded a reluctant American Jewish establishment while trying to restrain non-establishment activists. The initiative to smuggle Jewish books and ritual objects into the Soviet Union was Israeli; but Jerusalem at times seemed more concerned about its diplomatic relations with Moscow than about the campaign to free Soviet Jews.

Beyond the practicalities, though, Israel's very existence inspired the Soviet Jewish rebellion and gave it historic coherence as a movement for national repatriation. In the end, the Kremlin was correct to view Zionism as a formidable ideological foe. The Soviet Jewry movement resolved a century-long struggle between Bolshevism and Zionism. Young Jews in czarist Russia were pulled between proletarian revolution and Jewish renewal. In his autobiography, Chaim Weizmann, the great Zionist leader who became Israel's first president, describes vehement ideological debates among Russian Jewish students in pre-World War I Switzerland, including "the arrogant Trotsky," who expressed contempt for "any Jew who was moved by the fate of his people and animated by a love of its history and its tradition." A century after its founding in czarist Russia, Zionism retrieved the grandchildren of the Jews who opted for Soviet rule.

The American protest movement ensured that Soviet Jews would be freed, but Israel ensured that they would be Jewish. The process of re-connecting Soviet Jews to their Jewish identity, begun with the Six Day War, culminated when Israel absorbed a million immigrants from the former Soviet Union through the 1990s. Unlike the refuseniks who emigrated in the 1960s and 1970s, the overwhelming majority of the émigrés of the 1990s had almost no Jewish consciousness. But the cultural pressures of joining a sovereign Jewish majority with a public space determined by the Hebrew language and the Jewish calendar have meant that Soviet Jews—and their non-Jewish spouses—have been gradually absorbed into some form of Jewish identity. True, the religious establishment, dominated by the ultra-Orthodox, is blocking the conversion to Judaism of non-halachically Jewish Russian immigrants. (The ultra-Orthodox community that did virtually nothing to save Soviet Jews now tries to prevent their full absorption into the Jewish people.) But for all the travails of immigration, Israel remains the one place where assimilation enhances Jewish continuity.

HOW RELEVANT IS the history of the struggle for Soviet Jewry to other dissident movements? With the rise of the Green Movement in Iran, this is now an urgent question. In several ways the two situations are fundamentally different. Unlike Soviet leaders, prevented from adopting overtly murderous means by the need to engage with the West and by the memory of Stalinism, Iran's Islamist leaders have few con-

straints. Also Iranian dissidents lack the external support system that refuseniks could depend on. (If the global left were truly a moral force, it would provide that support system for Iranian dissidents, rather than misdirecting almost the entirety of its active sympathy to the Hamas regime in Gaza.) But Iranian dissidents have one advantage over the refuseniks: Islamist Iran is a far less sealed society than was the Soviet Union. And the information age further enhances transparency and regime vulnerability. Even Ahmadinejad, who grandstands before the media, cares about Iran's image.

The refusenik precedent established the principle that dissidents willing to risk their security and their happiness for freedom deserve Western support, regardless of their movement's apparent chances for success. When demonstrators in Tehran chanted that President Obama needs to choose between their cause and the regime, they were presenting a moral ultimatum. Non-intervention, as the refuseniks insisted, is itself a form of intervention, and on behalf of the oppressor. In distancing himself from Iranian dissidents, Barack Obama has become the spiritual heir of Richard Nixon, who was prepared to sacrifice the refuseniks for the sake of détente. Arguably not since Nixon has there been an American president so aloof from the pleas of dissidents, so reluctant to apply American power to challenge their tormentors. Given the moral abdication of the White House, Congress should take up the cause of the Iranian dissidents, as it did the Soviet Jewish dissidents.

The cause of human rights does not preclude détente—or as Obama prefers to put it, engagement—with dictators. In fact the opposite is true. One of the lessons of the Jackson-Vanik amendment is that pressure works when a dictatorship senses a benefit in the easing of repression. Through the 1970s, the Kremlin released tens of thousands of Jews, hoping to induce Congress to rescind the amendment. But when American-Soviet relations all but collapsed following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Kremlin lost hope of winning trade credits and an arms control agreement, and emigration was almost completely halted. So Jackson needed Nixon. Dictators should be engaged with, so long as they can also be punished. Gal Beckerman's book is a timely reminder that the most seemingly impermeable regimes are vulnerable to a combination of internal dissent and outside pressure. In the end, the most important lesson of the Soviet Jewry movement is that it worked. ♦

Washington Diarist

Reconstruction

OVER A PERFECTLY prepared bowl of *cholent*, the coarse stew to which all Galicianer souls are superstitiously attached, I sat in the kosher restaurant in Munich last week, on the gleaming modernist island of the city's new Jewish institutions, and read the correspondence between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt, which has just been published in Germany. The radio played American oldies of the 1960s, in a pernicious attempt to make me feel at home. The situation was emotionally impossible, of course. It did not help that Thilo Sarrazin's vile book, in which he deploys against Muslims in Germany the same argument that, from the eighteenth century onward, was deployed against Jews in Germany—they live apart, they have laws of their own, they do not integrate well—was flying out of the local bookstores. Some Germans are again mistaking alterity for a security threat. A day earlier I made my pilgrimage to the Glyptothek, which houses the single most erotic piece of stone I have ever seen, the ancient Greek statue of a languid satyr known as the Barberini Faun, and discovered again that flesh may envy the condition of marble; and when somehow I tore my eyes away from the imperishably beautiful man and stepped out into the Königsplatz, I found myself in the former epicenter of Nazism, on the plaza where in 1933 the books were burned, with the old headquarters of the Nazi Party still overlooking the square. Not for the first time I had the disagreeable experience of evil humiliating beauty. So I fled to the *cholent* and lost myself in Scholem, an old habit.

THE LETTERS BEGIN where one would expect them to begin—with Walter Benjamin, his fate (Arendt sends the news of his suicide to Scholem from Montauban) and the fate of his manuscripts—and ends where one would expect them to end—with the rupture of their friendship over *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which Scholem rightly despised. The friendship seems never to have been very warm. But

there are hundreds of pages of letters about a common enterprise that more than once brought me to the brink of tears. In 1944, Arendt prepared a "Tentative List of Jewish Cultural Treasures in Axis-Occupied Countries" for the Commission on European Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, and in 1948 she became executive director of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, for whom she went on an extended fact-finding mission in Europe in 1949–1950, searching for Jewish ceremonial objects and, mainly, for Jewish books. The new volume reproduces her "field reports." She establishes that there are caches of Jewish books in Munich, Amberg, Neuburg, Nuernberg, and Wuerzburg. There are 1,239 books with the stamp of the Jewish community in the Munich Municipal Library. In Heidelberg, two hundred Jewish books "of more than ordinary interest" have been returned by the Municipal Library to Mr. Sprecher, the librarian of the local Jewish library. Fifty thousand Jewish books are in a printing shop in Poestneck, where the SS brought them. A huge depot of Jewish books, assembled by the Nazis, is in Offenbach, and some of it has been distributed to Jews in DP camps. In the old Jewish community building in the eastern sector of Berlin, there are between eight thousand and ten thousand Jewish books as well as many archives, and "at least 70 bound volumes of Ketuwoth [marriage contracts] from Amsterdam covering at least a period of 250 years or more." "Considerable quantities of Judaica and Hebraica are now being offered through dealers from the eastern zones because of an acute lack of money." In Worms, a certain Dr. Illert is refusing to relinquish some treasures, because "in his opinion, Worms will get some Jews back, if he only holds on to what he has." Arendt writes to Scholem about her investigations. He writes back to her with his characteristic ferocity of purpose. It makes no sense to restore the books to localities that have no more Jews. He wants them to be allocated to the place where Jews will use them—to Jerusalem. "I herewith file the claim of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with regard to

the material in France." "I feel that the Bavarian archives should be allocated to the Hebrew University." He cannot understand why Hermann Cohen's library would be shipped anywhere else. He asks Arendt to send him the full list of the rare books at the huge depot in Wiesbaden. He insists upon the "priority rights" of the Hebrew University to "things which exist only in one copy," and to archives that "are of general Jewish historical significance." His goal is a living and self-respecting culture, which must be built on a foundation of books, and even manuscripts.

JEWISH CULTURAL Reconstruction recovered 1.5 million Jewish books. What are 1.5 million recovered books, next to 6 million unrecovered people? It is a fair question, except that there was nothing petty or indecent about this bibliophilia. This was a campaign for the re-capture of a people's dignity. Its objective was to affirm the sovereignty of the Jews over their own resources. The book-hunt in the ruins was based on a proper understanding of the historical role, and the spiritual power, of the books that were hunted. They are the edifices of the Jews. I hold my palaces in my hands. My cathedrals are on my shelves. One loves books because one loves life. Is it possible any longer to grasp that books once meant so much? Does anybody still weep for lost books? It is an illusion that digitalization has made culture less vulnerable: it has invented a new method of erasure. I can morbidly imagine a day when they come for the Kindles, and the only way to save a piece of a culture will be to print out a book and take the paper into hiding, until hell passes. The common enemy of Scholem and Arendt was oblivion. Oblivion comes in many forms. There is natural oblivion, the Ozymandian kind, the ordinary forgetfulness that secures the future against the disabling suspicion that everything has already been done; and there is unnatural oblivion, coerced oblivion, the apparently ineradicable desire to wipe some group or some culture from the face of the earth. A people that has suffered unnatural oblivion will find it hard to acquiesce in the natural sort, because it looks like disappearance by another name. It is said that the "memory" of the computer marks the end of oblivion. I think not: cyberspace, too, is a sinkhole. The only defense against oblivion is the human defense—the will to remember, to defy time, which must be nurtured with reasons. War is not the only circumstance that enjoins cultural reconstruction.

LEON WIESELTIER



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